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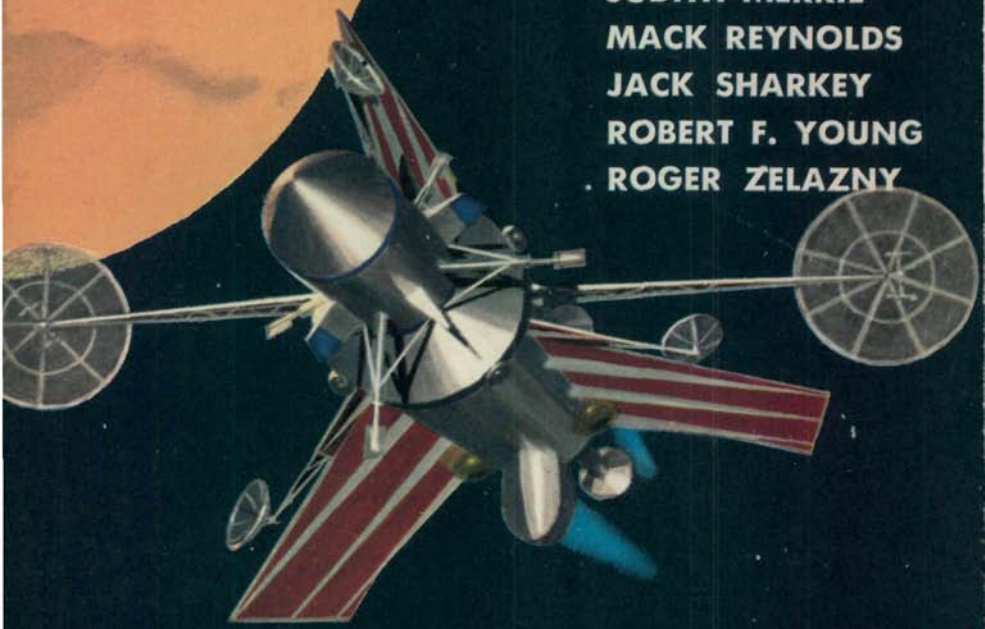

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

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In the relatively short time that Roger Zelazny has been writing science fiction, he has gone from talented newcomer to one of the most exciting writers in the field. His first story for F&SF (A ROSE FOR ECCLESIASTES, Nov., 1963) appeared less than two years ago. Perhaps you have occasionally paused with a good story in your lap, closed your eyes and sensed the characters about you —felt as if you could reach out and touch a tear or steady a trembling hand. At a later pause, you may have felt the heat of battle, heard the crackle of a weapon. And, if you were truly fortunate, caught yourself further along in the narrative smiling, or laughing out loud. This is the sort of story you are about to read—full of compassion and humor and stunning action; about a ruined Earth, dying, but not yet dead, and of the dreams and struggles of man and mutant and alien for its legacy.

. . . AND CALL ME CONRAD

by Roger Zelazny

"YOU ARE A KALLIKANZAROS," she announced suddenly.

I turned onto my left side and smiled through the darkness.

"I left my hooves and my horns at the Office."

"You've heard the story!"

"The name *is* 'Nomikos'."

I reached for her, found her.

"Are you going to destroy the world this time around?"

I laughed and drew her to me.

"I'll think about it. If that's the way the Earth crumbles—"

"You know that children born here on Christmas are of the kallikanzaroi blood," she said, "and you once told me that your birthday . . ."

"All right!"

It had struck me that she was only half-joking. Knowing some of the things one occasionally meets in the Old Places, the Hot Places, you can almost believe in myths without extra effort—such as the story of those Pan-like sprites who gather together every spring to spend ten days sawing at the Tree of the World, only to be dispersed at the last moment by the ringing of the Easter bells. (*Ring-a-ding,*

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the bells, *gnash, gnash,* the teeth, *clackety-clack,* the hooves, etcetera.) Cassandra and I were not in the habit of discussing religion, politics, or Aegaean folklore in bed—but, me having been born in these parts, the memories are still somehow alive.

"I am hurt," I said, only half-joking.

"You're hurting *me,* too . . ."

"Sorry."

I relaxed again.

After a time I explained:

"Back when I was a brat, the other brats used to push me around, called me 'Konstantin Kallikanzaros'. When I got bigger and uglier they stopped doing it. At least, they didn't say it to my face—"

" 'Konstantin'? That was your name? I've wondered . . ."

"It's 'Conrad' now, so forget it."

"But I like it. I'd rather call you 'Konstantin' than 'Conrad'."

"If it makes you happy . . ."

The moon pushed her ravaged face up over the windowsill to mock me. I couldn't reach the moon, or even the window, so I looked away. The night was cold, was damp, was misty as it always is here.

"The Commissioner of Arts, Monuments and Archives for the planet Earth is hardly out to chop down the Tree of the World," I rasped.

"*My* kallikanzaros," she said too quickly, "I did not say that. But there are fewer bells every year, and it is not always desire that matters. I have this feeling that you *will* change things, somehow. Perhaps—"

"You are wrong, Cassandra."

"And I am afraid, and cold—"

And she was lovely in the darkness, so I held her in my arms to sort of keep her from the foggy foggy dew.

In attempting to reconstruct the affairs of these past six months, I realize now that as we willed walls of passion around our October and the isle of Kos, the Earth had already fallen into the hands of those powers which smash all Octobers. Marshalled from within and without, the forces of final disruption were even then goose-stepping amidst the ruins—faceless, ineluctable, arms upraised. Cort Myshtigo had landed at Port-au-Prince in the antique *Sol-Bus Nine,* which had borne him in from Titan along with a load of shirts and shoes, underwear, sox, assorted wines, medical supplies, and the latest tapes from civilization. A wealthy and influential galacto-journalist, he. Just how wealthy, we were not to learn for many weeks; just how influential, I found out only five days ago. And the long-dormant Radpol was stirring again, but I did not know of it until several days later.

The Radpol. The old Radpol . . .

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Once chief among the stirrers of disruption, the Radpol had lapsed into a long quiescence.

After the departure of its sinister half-man founder, Karaghiosis the killer (who strangely resembled me, a very few old timers have said —tut!), the Radpol had weakened, had slept.

It had done its necessary troubling, however, over half a century ago, and the Vegans stayed stalemated.

But Vega could buy the Earth-office—which runs this blamed world—and sell it many times over for kicks from out of the Petty Cash drawer—because Earthgov Absentia lives off Vegan droppings.

Vega hadn't been too eager to try it, though.

Not since the Radpol led the Returnist Rebellion, melted Madagascar, and showed them that they *cared*. Earthgov had been busy selling pieces of real estate, to Vegans; this, via the Office, Earthgov's civil service infection here among the isles of the world.

All sales ceased, Vega withdrew, and the Radpol dozed, dreaming its Big Dream—of the return of men to Earth.

The Office went on administering. The days of Karaghiosis had passed.

As we wandered among the olive groves gone wild, picked our way through the ruins of the Frankish castle, or mixed our tracks with the hieroglyph-prints of the herring-gulls, there on the wet sands of the beaches of Kos, we were burning time while waiting for a ransom which could not come, which should never, really, have been expected.

Cassandra's hair is the color of Katamara olives, and shiny. Her hands are soft, the fingers short, delicately webbed. Her eyes are very dark. She is only about four inches shorter than me, which makes her gracefulness something of an achievement, me being well over six feet. Of course, any woman looks graceful, precise and handsome when walking at my side, because I am none of these things: my left cheek is a map of Africa done up in varying purples, because of that mutant fungus I picked up from a moldy canvas—back when I was disinterring the Guggenheim for the New York Tour; my hairline peaks to within a fingerbreadth of my brow; my eyes are mismatched. (I glare at people through the cold blue one on the right side when I want to intimidate them; the brown one is for Glances Sincere and Honest.) I wear a reinforced boot because of my short right leg.

Cassandra doesn't require contrasting, though. She's beautiful.

I met her by accident, pursued her with desperation, married her against my will. (The last part was her idea.) I wasn't really thinking about it, myself—even on that day

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when I brought my caique into the harbor and saw her there, sunning herself like a mermaid beside the plane tree of Hippocrates, and decided that I wanted her. Kallikanzaroi have never been much the family sort. I just sort of slipped up, again.

It was a clean morning. It was starting our third month together. It was my last day on Kos—because of a call I'd received the evening before. Everything was still moist from the night's rain, and we sat out on the patio drinking Turkish coffee and eating oranges. Day was starting to lever its way into the world. The breeze was intermittent, was damp, goosepimpled us beneath the black bulk of our sweaters, skimmed the steam off the top of the coffee.

"I feel crummy," I said.

"I know," she said. "Don't."

"Can't help it. Got to go away and leave you, and that's crummy."

"It may only be a few weeks. You said so yourself. Then you'll be back."

". . . Hope so," I said. "If it takes any longer though, I'll send for you. Dunno where all I'll be, yet."

"Who is Cort Myshtigo?"

"Vegan actor, journalist. Important one. Wants to write about what's left of Earth. So I've got to show it to him. Me. Personally. Damn!"

"Anybody who takes ten-month vacations to go sailing can't complain about being overworked."

"I can complain—and I will. My job is supposed to be a sinecure."

"Why?"

"Mainly because I made it that way. I worked hard for twenty years to make Arts, Monuments and Archives what it is, and ten years ago I got it to the point where my staff could handle just about everything. So I got me turned out to pasture, I got me told to come back occasionally to sign papers and to do whatever I damn pleased in the meantime. Now this—this bootlicking gesture——having a commissioner take a Vegan scribbler on a tour any staff guide could conduct! Vegans aren't gods!"

"Wait a minute," she said, "please . . . Twenty years? Ten years?"

Sinking feeling.

"You're not even thirty years old." . .

I sank further. I waited. I rose again.

"Uh—there's something I, well, in my own reticent way, sort of never quite got around to mentioning to you . . . How old are you anyway, Cassandra?"

"Twenty."

"Uh-huh. Well . . . I'm around four times your age."

"I don't understand."

"Neither do I. Or the doctors. I just sort of stopped, somewhere between twenty and thirty, and I stayed that way. I guess that's a

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sort of, well—a part of my particular mutation, I guess. Does it make any difference?"

"I don't know . . . Yes."

"You don't mind my limp, or my excessive shagginess, or even my face. Why should my age bother you? I *am* young, for all necessary purposes."

"It's just that it's not the same," she said with an unarguable finality. "What if you never grow old?"

I bit my lip, when I wanted to be biting hers.

"I'm bound to, sooner or later."

"And if it's later? I love you. I don't want to out-age you."

"You'll live to be a hundred and fifty. There are the S-S treatments. You'll have them."

"But they won't keep me young—like you."

"I'm not really young. I was born old."

That one didn't work either. She started to cry.

"That's years and years away," I told her. "Who knows what will happen in the meantime?"

That only made her cry more.

I've always been impulsive. My thinking is usually pretty good, but I always seem to do it after I do my talking—by which time I've generally destroyed all basis for further conversation.

Which is one of the reasons I have a competent staff, a good radio, and am out to pasture most of the time. But there are some things you just can't delegate.

So I said:

"Look, you have a touch of the Hot Stuff in you, too. It took me forty years to realize I wasn't forty years old. Maybe you're the same way. I'm just a neighborhood kid . . ."

"Do you know of any other cases like your own?"

"Well . . ."

"No, you don't."

"No. I don't."

I waited until she had stopped crying and I could feel her eyes on me again. Then I waited some more.

"Well?" I asked, finally.

"Pretty well, thanks."

I found and held her passive hand, raised it to my lips. "Rodos dactylos," I breathed, and she said, "Maybe it's a good idea—your going away—for awhile anyhow . . ." and the breeze that skimmed the steam came again, was damp, goosepimpled us, and made either her hand or my hand shake—I'm not sure which. It shook the leaves too, and they emptied over our heads.

"Did you exaggerate your age to me?" she asked. "Even a little bit?"

Her tone of voice suggested that agreement would be the wisest reply.

So, "Yes," I said, truthfully.

She smiled back then, somewhat reassured of my humanity.

Ha!

So we sat there, holding hands and watching the morning. After

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awhile she began humming. It was a sad song, centuries old. A ballad. It told the story of a young wrestler named Themocles, a wrestler who had never been beaten. He eventually came to consider himself the greatest wrestler alive. Finally, he called out his challenge from a mountaintop, and that being too near home the gods acted fast: The following day a crippled boy rode into the town, on the plated back of a huge wild dog. They wrestled for three days and three nights, Themocles and the boy, and on the fourth day the boy broke his back and left him there in the field. Wherever his blood fell, there sprang up the strige-fleur, as Emmet calls it, the blood-drinking flower that creeps rootless at night, seeking the lost spirit of the fallen champion in the blood of its victims. But Themocles' spirit is gone from the Earth, so they must creep, seeking, forever. Simpler than Aeschylus, but then we're a simpler people than we once were, especially the Mainlanders. Besides, that's not the way it really happened.

"Why are you weeping?" she asked me suddenly.

"I am thinking of the pictures on Achilleus' shield," I said, "and of what a terrible thing it is to be an educated beast—and I am not weeping. The leaves are dripping on me."

"I'll make some more coffee."

The sun wandered up higher into the sky, and after a time there came a sound of hammering from the yard of old Aldones, the coffin-maker. The cyclamen had come awake, and the breezes carried their fragrance to us from across the fields. High overhead, like a dark omen, a spiderbat glided across the sky toward the mainland. I ached to wrap my fingers around the stock of a thirty-oh-six, make loud noises, and watch it fall. The only firearms I knew of were aboard my ship, the *Vanitie* though, so I just watched it vanish from sight.

"They say that they're not really native to Earth," she told me, watching it go, "and that they were brought here from Titan, for zoos and things like that."

"That's right."

". . . And that they got loose during the Three Days and went wild, and that they grow bigger here than they ever did on their own world."

"One time I saw one with a thirty-two foot wingspread."

"My great-uncle once told me a story he had heard in Athens," she recalled, "about a man killing one without any weapons. It snatched him up from off the dock he was standing on—at Piraeus—and the man broke its neck with his hands. They fell about a hundred feet into the bay. The man lived."

"That was a long time ago," I remembered, "back before the Office started its campaign to exter-

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minate the things. There were a lot more around, and they were bolder in those days. They shy away from cities now."

"The man's name was Konstantin, as I recall the story. Could it have been you?"

"His last name was Karaghiosis."

"Are you Karaghiosis?"

"If you want me to be. Why?"

"Because he later helped to found the Returnist Radpol in Athens, and you have very strong hands."

"Are you a Returnist?"

"Yes. Are you?"

"I work for the Office. I don't have any political opinions."

"Karaghiosis bombed resorts."

"So he did."

"Are you sorry he bombed them?"

"No."

"I don't really know much about you, do I?"

"You know anything about me. Just ask. I'm really quite simple. —My air taxi is coming now."

"I don't hear anything."

"You will."

After a moment it came sliding down the sky toward Kos, homing in on the beacon I had set up at the end of the patio. I stood and drew her to her feet as it buzzed in low —a Radson Skimmer: a twenty-foot cockleshell of reflection and transparency; flat-bottomed, blunt-nosed.

"Anything you want to take with you?" she asked.

"You know it, but I can't."

The Skimmer settled and its side slid open. The goggled pilot turned his head.

"I have a feeling," she said, "that you are heading into some sort of danger."

"I doubt it, Cassandra."

Nor pressure, nor osmosis will restore Adam's lost rib, thank God.

"Good-bye, Cassandra."

"Good-bye, my kallikanzaros."

And I got into the Skimmer and jumped into the sky, breathing a prayer to Aphrodite. Below me, Cassandra waved. Behind me, the sun tightened its net of light. We sped westward, and this is the place for a smooth transition, but there isn't any. From Kos to Port-au-Prince was four hours, gray water, pale stars, and me mad. Watch the colored lights . . .

The hall was lousy with people, a big tropical moon was shining fit to bust, and the reason I could see both was because I'd finally managed to lure Ellen Emmet out onto the balcony and the doors were mag-pegged open.

"Back from the dead again," she had greeted me, smiling slightly. "Gone almost a year, and not so much as a Get Well Card from Ceylon."

"Were you ill?"

"I could have been."

She was small and, like all day-haters, creamy somewhere under her simicolor. She reminded me of

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an elaborate action-doll with a faulty mechanism—cold grace, and a propensity to kick people in the shins when they least expected it; and she had lots and lots of orangebrown hair, woven into a Gordian knot of a coif that frustrated me as I worked at untying it, mentally; her eyes were of whatever color it pleased the god of her choice on that particular day—I forget now, but they're always blue somewhere deep deep down inside. Whatever she was wearing was browngreen, and there was enough of it to go around a couple times and make her look like a shapeless weed, which was a dressmaker's lie if there ever was one, unless she was pregnant again, which I doubted.

"Well, get well," I said, "if you need to. I didn't make Ceylon. I was in the Mediterranean most of the time."

Ellen leaned back on the railing.

"I hear you're somewhat married these days."

"True," I agreed, "also somewhat harried. Why did they call me back?"

"Ask your boss."

"I did. He said I'm going to be a guide. What I want to know though is *why*?—The real reason. I've been thinking about it and it's grown more puzzling."

"So how should I know?"

"You know everything."

"You overestimate me, dear. What's she like?"

I shrugged. "A mermaid, maybe. Why?"

She shrugged. "Just curious. What do you tell people I'm like?"

"I don't tell people you're like anything."

"I'm insulted. I must be like something, unless I'm unique."

"That's it, you're unique."

"Then why didn't you take me away with you last year?"

"Because you're a People person and you require a city around you. You could only be happy here at the Port."

"You know," she said after a time, "you're so damned ugly you're attractive. That must be it."

I stopped in mid-reach, a couple inches from her shoulder.

"You know," she continued, her voice flat, emptied of emotion, "you're a nightmare that walks like a man."

I dropped my hand, chuckled inside a tight chest.

"I know," I said. "Pleasant dreams."

I started to turn away and she caught my sleeve.

"Wait!"

I looked down at her hand, up at her eyes, then back down at her hand. She let go.

"You know I never tell the truth," she said. Then she laughed her little brittle laugh.

". . . And I *have* thought of something you ought to know about this trip. Donald Dos Santos is here, and I think he's going along."

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"Dos Santos? That's ridiculous."

"He's up in the library now, with George and some big Arab."

I looked past her and down into the harbor section, watching the shadows, like my thoughts, move along dim streets, dark and slow.

"Big Arab?" I said, after a time. "Scarred hands? Yellow eyes?—Name of Hasan?"

"Yes, that's right. Have you met him?"

"He's done some work for me in the past," I acknowledged.

So I smiled, even though my blood was refrigerating, because I don't like people to know what I'm thinking.

"You're smiling," she said. "What are you thinking?"

She's like that.

"I'm thinking how is George—and how is his bug collection these days?"

She sort of smiled.

"Growing," she replied, "by leaps and bounds. Buzzes and crawls too—and some of those crawlies are radioactive. I say to him, 'George, why don't you run around with other women instead of spending all your time with those bugs?' But he just shakes his head and looks dedicated. Then I say, 'George, one day one of those uglies is going to bite you and make you impotent. What'll you do then?' Then he explains that that can't happen, and he lectures me on insect toxins. Maybe he's really a big bug himself, in disguise. I think he gets some kind of sexual pleasure out of watching them swarm around in those tanks. I don't know what else—"

I turned away and looked inside the hall then, because her face was no longer *her* face. When I heard her laugh a moment later I turned back and squeezed her shoulder.

"Okay, I know more than I knew before. Thanks. I'll see you sometime soon."

"Should I wait?"

"No. Good night."

"Good night, Conrad."

And I was away.

Crossing a room can be a ticklish and time-consuming business: if it's full of people, if the people all know you, if the people are all holding glasses, if you have even a slight tendency to limp.

It was, they did and they were, and I do. So. . .

Thinking very inconspicuous thoughts, I edged my way along the wall just at the periphery of humanity. This, for about twenty feet, until I reached Phil Graber—and the enclave of young ladies the old celibate always has hovering about him. Chinless, near-lipless, going hairless, the expression that once lived in that flesh which covers his skull had long ago retreated into the darkness of his eyes, and the eyes had it as they caught me—the smile of imminent outrage.

"Phil," said I, nodding, "not everybody can write a masque like

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that. I've heard it said that it's a dying art, but now I know better."

"You're still alive," he said, in a voice seventy years younger than the rest of him, "and late again, as usual."

"I abase myself in my contrition," I told him, "but I was detained at a birthday party for a lady aged seven, at the home of an old friend." (Which was true, but it has nothing to do with this story.)

"All your friends are old friends, aren't they?" he asked, and that was hitting below the belt, just because I had once known his barely-remembered parents, and had taken them around to the south side of the Erechtheum in order to show them the Porch of the Maidens and point out what Lord Elgin had done with the rest, all the while carrying their bright-eyed youngster on my shoulders and telling him tales that were old when the place was built.

". . .And I need your help," I added, ignoring the jibe and gently pushing my way through the soft, pungent circle of femininity. "It'll take me all night to cross this hall to where Sands is holding court with the Vegan and I don't have all night. So how about it? Get me from here to there in a minimum of time in your typical courtier-like fashion, with a running conversation that no one would dare interrupt. Okay? Let's run."

He nodded brusquely.

We started across the room, negotiating alleys of people. High overhead, the chandeliers drifted and turned like facetted satellites of ice. The thelinstra was an intelligent Aeolain harp, tossing its shards of song into the air—pieces of colored glass. The people buzzed and drifted like certain of George Emmet's insects, and we avoided their swarms by putting one foot in front of another without pause and making noises of our own. We didn't step on anybody who squashed.

"I hear Dos Santos is here," I said.

"So he is."

"Why?"

"I don't really know, or care."

"Tsk and tsk. What happened to your wonderful political consciousness? The Department of Literary Criticism used to praise you for it."

"At my age, the smell of death becomes more and more unsettling each time that it is encountered."

"And Dos Santos smells?"

"He tends to reek."

"I have heard that he's employed a former associate of ours—from the days of the Madagascar Affair."

Phil cocked his head to one side, shot me a quizzical look.

"You hear things quite quickly. But then, you're a friend of Ellen's. Yes, Hasan is here. He's upstairs with Don."

"Whose karmic burden is he likely to help lighten?"

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"As I said before, I don't really know or care about any of this."

I squinted at him, and then, as he turned away, I followed the direction of his gaze toward the easy chairs set in the alcove formed by the northeast corner of the room on two sides and the bulk of the thelinstra on the third. The thelinstra-player was an old lady with dreamy eyes. Earthdirector Lorel Sands was smoking his pipe . . .

Now, the pipe is one of the more interesting facets of Lorel's personality. It's a real Meerschaum, and there aren't too many of them left in the world. As for the rest of him, his function is rather like that of an anti-computer: you feed him all kinds of carefully garnered facts, figures, and statistics and he translates them into garbage. Keen dark eyes, and a slow, rumbly way of speaking while he holds you with them; rarely given to gestures, but then very deliberate as he saws the air with a wide right hand or pokes imaginary ladies with his pipe; white at the temples and dark above; he is high of cheekbone, has a complexion that matches his tweeds (he assiduously avoids Dress Blacks), and he constantly strives to push his jaw an inch higher and further forward than seems comfortable. He is a political appointee, by the Earthgov on Taler, and he takes his work quite seriously, even to the extent of demonstrating his dedication with periodic attacks of ulcers. He is not the most intelligent man on Earth. He is my boss. He is also one of the best friends I have.

Beside him sat Cort Myshtigo. I could almost feel Phil hating him —from the pale blue soles of his six-toed feet to the pink upper-caste dye of his temple-to-temple hairstrip. Not hating him so much because he was him, but hating him, I was sure, because he was the closest available relative—grandson—of Tatram Yshtigo, who forty years before had commenced to demonstrate that the greatest living writer in the English language was a Vegan. The old gent is still at it, and I don't believe Phil has ever forgiven him.

Out of the corner of my eye (the blue one) I saw Ellen ascending the big, ornate stairway on the other side of the hall. Out of the other corner of my other eye I saw Lorel looking in my direction.

"I," said I, "have been spotted, and I must go now to pay my respects to the William Seabrook of Taler. Come along?"

Well . . . Very well," said Phil, "suffering is good for the soul."

We moved on to the alcove, stood before the two chairs, between the music and the noise, there in the place of power. Lorel stood slowly, shook hands. Myshtigo stood more slowly, did not shake hands; he stared, amber-eyed, as we were introduced, his face expressionless. His loose-hanging orange shirt fluttered constantly as his chambered

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lungs forced their perpetual exhalation out the anterior nostrils at the base of his wide ribcage. He nodded briefly, repeated my name. Then he turned to Phil with something like a smile.

"Would you care to have me translate your masque into English?" he asked, his voice sounding like a dying-down tuning fork.

Phil turned on his heel and walked away.

Then I thought the Vegan was ill for a second, until I recollected that a Vegan laugh sounds something like a billy goat choking. I try to stay away from Vegans by avoiding the resorts.

"Sit down," said Lorel, looking uncomfortable behind his pipe.

I drew up a chair and set it across from them.

"Okay."

"Cort is going to write a book," said Lorel.

"So you've said."

"About the Earth."

I nodded.

"He expressed a desire that you be his guide on a tour of certain of the Old Places . . ."

"I am honored," I said rather stiffly. "Also, I am curious what determined his selection of me as guide."

"—and even more curious as to what he may know about you, eh?" interrupted the Vegan.

"Yes, I am," I agreed, "by a couple hundred percent."

"I started by checking the Vite-Stats Register for Earth when I first conceived of this project—just for general human data—then, after I'd turned up an interesting item, I tried the Earthoffice Personnel Banks—"

"Um-hm," I said.

"—and I was more impressed by what they did not say of you than by what they said."

I shrugged.

"According to your personnel record, you're seventy-seven years old. According to Vite-Stats, you're either a hundred-eleven or a hundred-thirty."

"I fibbed about my age to get the job. There was a Depression going on."

"—So I made up a Nomikos-profile, which is a kind of distinctive thing, and I set Vite-Stats to hunting down .001 physical analogues in all of its banks, including the closed ones."

"Some people collect old coins, other people build model rockets."

". . . And I found that you could have been three or four or five other persons, all of them Greeks, and one of them truly amazing. But, of course, Konstantin Korones, one of the older ones, was born two hundred thirty-four years ago. On Christmas. Blue eye, brown eye. Game right leg. Same hairline, at age twenty-three. Same height, and same Bertillion scales."

"Same fingerprints? Same retinal patterns?"

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"These were not included in many of the older Registry files. Maybe they were sloppier in those days? I don't know. More careless, perhaps, as to who had access to public records . . ."

"You are aware that there are over four million persons on this planet right now. By searching back through the past three or four centuries I daresay you could find doubles, or even triples, for quite a few of them. So what?"

"It serves to make you somewhat intriguing, that's all, almost like a spirit of place—and you are as curiously ruined as this place is. Doubtless, I shall never achieve your age, whatever it may be, and I was curious as to the sort of sensibilities a human might cultivate, given so much time—especially in view of your position as a master of your world's history and art.

"So, that is why I asked for your services," he concluded.

"Now that you've met me, ruined and all, can I go home?"

"Conrad!" The pipe attacked me.

"No, Mister Nomikos, there are practical considerations also. This is a tough world, and you have a high survival potential. I want you with me because I want to survive."

I shrugged again. "Well, that's settled. What now?"

He chuckled. "I perceive that you dislike me."

"Whatever gave you that idea? Just because you insulted a friend of mine, asked me impertinent questions, impressed me into your service on a whim—"

"—exploited your countrymen, turned your world into a brothel, and demonstrated the utter provinciality of the human race, as compared to a galactic culture eons older . . ."

"I'm not talking your race-my race. I'm talking personal talk. And I repeat, you insulted my friend, asked me impertinent questions, impressed me into your service on a whim."

"[*Billy goat snuffle*]! to all three!—It is an insult to the shades of Homer and Dante to have that man sing for the human race —"

"—At the moment, he's the best we've got."

"—In which case, you should do without."

"You behave like a Royal Representative in a Crown Colony," I decided, pronouncing the capitals, "and I don't like it. I've read all your books. I've also read your granddad's—like, his *Earthwhore's Lament*—and you'll never be the man he is. He has a thing called compassion. You don't. Anything you feel about old Phil goes double for you, in *my* book."

That part about grandpa must have touched on a sore spot, because he flinched when my blue gaze hit him.

"So kiss my elbow," I added, or something like that, in Vegan.

Sands doesn't speak enough

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Veggy to have caught it, but he made conciliatory noises immediately, looking about the while to be sure we were not being overheard.

"Conrad, please find your professional attitude and put it back on.—Srin Shtigo, why don't we get on with the planning?"

Myshtigo smiled his bluegreen smile.

"And minimize our differences?" he asked. "All right."

"Then let's adjourn to the library—where it's quieter—and we can use the map-screen."

"Fine."

I felt a bit reinforced as we rose to go, because Don Dos Santos was up there and he hates Vegans, and wherever Dos Santos is, there is always Diane, the girl with the red wig, and she hates everybody; and I knew George Emmet was upstairs, and Ellen, too—and George is a real cold fish around strangers (friends too, for that matter); and perhaps Phil would wander in later and fire on Fort Sumter; and then there was Hasan—he doesn't say much, he just sits there and smokes his weeds and looks opaque—and if you stood too near him and took a couple deep breaths you wouldn't care what the hell you said to Vegans, or people either.

I had hoped that Hasan's memory would be on the rocks, or else up there somewhere among the clouds.

Hope died as we entered the library. He was sitting straight and sipping lemonade.

Eighty or ninety or more, looking about forty, he could still act thirty. The Sprung-Samser treatments had found highly responsive material. It's not often that way. Almost never, in fact. They put some people into accelerated anaphylactic shock for no apparent reason, and even an intracardial blast of adrenalin won't haul them back; others, most others, they freeze at five or six decades. But some rare ones actually grow younger when they take the series—about one in a hundred thousand.

It struck me as odd that in destiny's big shooting gallery *this* one should make it, in such a way.

It had been over fifty years since the Madagascar Affair in which Hasan had been employed by the Radpol in their vendetta against the Talerites. He had been in the pay of (Rest in Peace) the big K. in Athens, who had sent him to polish off the Earthgov Realty Company. He did it, too. And well. With one tiny fission device. Pow. Instant urban renewal. Called Hasan the Assassin by the Few, he is the last mercenary on Earth.

Also, besides Phil (who had not always been a wielder of the bladeless sword without a hilt), Hasan was one of the Very Few who could remember old Karaghios.

So, chin up and fungus forward,

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I tried to cloud his mind with my first glance. Either there were ancient and mysterious powers afoot, which I doubted, or he was higher than I'd thought, which was possible, or he had forgotten my face—which could have been possible, though not real likely—or he was exercising a professional ethic or a low animal cunning. (He possessed both of the latter, in varying degrees, but the accent was on the l.a.c.) He made no sign as we were introduced.

"My bodyguard, Hasan," said Dos Santos, flashing his magnesium-flare smile as I shook the hand that once had shaken the world, so to speak.

It was still a very strong hand.

"Conrad Nomikos," said Hasan, squinting as though he were reading it from off a scroll.

I knew everyone else in the room, so I hastened to the chair farthest from Hasan, and I kept my second drink in front of my face most of the time, just to be safe.

Diane of the Red Wig stood near. She spoke. She said, "Good morning, Mister Nomikos."

I nodded my drink.

"Good evening, Diane."

Tall, slim, wearing mostly white, she stood beside Dos Santos like a candle. I know it's a wig she wears, because I've seen it slip upwards on occasion, revealing part of an interesting and ugly scar which is hidden by the low hairline she normally keeps. I've often wondered about that scar, sometimes as I lay at anchor staring up at parts of constellations through clouds, or when I unearthed damaged statues. Purple lips—tattooed, I think—and I've never seen them smile; her jaw muscles are always raised cords because her teeth are always clenched; and there's a little upside-down "v" between her eyes, from all that frowning; and her chin is slight, held high—defiant? She barely moves her mouth when she speaks in that tight, choppy way of hers. I couldn't really guess at her age. Over thirty, that's all.

She and Don make an interesting pair. He is dark, loquacious, always smoking, unable to sit still for more than two minutes. She is taller by about five inches, burns without flickering. I still don't know all of her story. I guess I never will.

She came over and stood beside my chair while Lorel was introducing Cort to Dos Santos.

"You will conduct the tour."

"Everybody knows all about it but me," said I. "I don't suppose you could spare me a little of your knowledge on the matter?"

"No knowledge," she said, "yet. Ask Don."

"Will," said I.

Did, too. Later though. And I wasn't disappointed, inasmuch as I expected nothing.

But, as I sat trying as hard as I could to eavesdrop, there was sud-

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denly a sight-vision overlay, of the sort a shrink had once classified for me as a pseudotelepathic wish-fulfillment. It works like this—

I want to know what's going on somewhere. I have almost-sufficient information to guess. Therefore, I do. Only it comes on as though I am seeing it and hearing it through the eyes and ears of one of the parties involved. It's not real telepathy, though, I don't think, because it can sometimes be wrong. It sure seems real, though.

The shrink could tell me everything about it but why.

Which is how I

was standing in the middle of the room,

was staring at Myshtigo,

was Dos Santos,

was saying:

". . . Will be going along for your protection. Not as Radpol Secretary, just a private citizen."

"I did not solicit your protection," the Vegan was saying, "however, I thank you. I will accept your offer to circumvent my death at the hands of your comrades," and he smiled as he said it, "if they should seek it during my travels. I doubt that they will but I should be a fool to refuse the shield of Dos Santos."

"You are wise," we said, bowing slightly.

"Quite," said Cort. "Now tell me," he nodded toward Ellen, who had just finished arguing with George about anything and was stamping away from him, "who is that?"

"That," said we, "is Ellen Emmet, the wife of George Emmett, the Director of the Wildlife Conservation Department."

"What is her price?"

"I don't know that she's quoted one recently."

"Well, what did it used to be?"

"There never was one."

"Everything on Earth has a price."

"In that case, I suppose you'll have to find out for yourself."

"I will," he said.

Earth femmes have always held an odd attraction for Vegans. A Veggy once told me that they make him feel rather like a zoophilist. Which is interesting, because a pleasure girl at the Cote d'Or Resort told me, with a giggle, that Vegans made her feel rather like *une zoophiliste*. I guess those jets of air must tickle or something and arouse both beasts.

"By the way," we said, "have you stopped beating your wife lately?"

"Which one?" asked Myshtigo.

Fadeout, and me back in my chair.

". . . What," George Emmet was saying, "do you think of that?"

I stared at him. He hadn't been there a second ago. He had come up suddenly and perched himself on the wide wing of my chair.

"Come again, please. I was dozing."

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"I said, we've beaten the spiderbat. What do you think of that?"

"It rhymes," I observed. "So tell me how we've beaten the spiderbat."

But he was laughing. He's one of those guys with whom laughter is an unpredictable thing. He'll go around looking sour for days, and then some little thing will set him off giggling. He sort of gasps when he laughs, like a baby, and that impression is reinforced by his pink flaccidity and thinning hair. So I waited. Ellen was off insulting Lorel now, and Diane had turned to read the titles on the bookshelves.

Finally, "I've developed a new strain of *slishi,*" he panted confidentially.

"Say, that's really great!"

Then, "What are *slishi?*" I asked softly.

"The *slish* is a Bakabian parasite," he explained, "rather like a large tick. Mine are about three-eighths of an inch long," he said proudly, "and they burrow deep into the flesh and give off a highly poisonous waste product."

"Fatal?"

"Mine are."

"Could you lend me one?" I asked him.

"Why?"

"I want to drop it down someone's back. —On second thought, make it a couple dozen. I have lots of friends."

"Mine won't bother people, just spiderbats. They discriminate against people. People would poison my *slishi.*" (He said "my *slishi*" very possessively.) "Their host has to have a copper, rather than an iron-based metabolism," he explained, "and spiderbats fall into that category. That's why I want to go with you on this trip. The *slishi* multiply quite rapidly under Earth conditions, if they're given the proper host, and they should be extremely contagious if we could get them started at the right time of year. What I had in mind was the late southwestern spiderbat mating season. It will begin in six to eight weeks in the territory of California, in an Old Place—not real hot anymore, though—called Capistrano. I understand that your tour will take you out that way at about that time. When the spiderbats return to Capistrano I want to be waiting for them with the *slishi.* Also, I could use a vacation."

"Mm-hm. Have you talked this over with Lorel?"

"Yes, and he thinks it's a fine idea. In fact, he wants to meet us out there and take pictures. There may not be too many more opportunities to see them—darkening the sky with their flight, nesting about the ruins the way they do, eating the wild pigs, leaving their green droppings in the streets—it's rather beautiful, you know."

Lorel made apologetic sounds deep in his throat about then. He

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stood beside the big desk in the middle of the room, before which the broad viewscreen was slowly lowering itself. It was a thick depth-transparer, so nobody had to move around after a better seat. He pressed a button on the side of the desk and the upper part of Africa and most of the Mediterranean countries appeared.

The lights dimmed and Myshtigo moved to the desk. He looked at the map, and then at nobody in particular.

"I want to visit certain key sites which, for one reason or another, are important in the history of your world," he said. "I'd like to start with Egypt, Greece and Rome. Then I'd like to move on quickly through Madrid, Paris and London." The maps shifted as he talked, not fast enough though, to keep up with him. "Then I want to backtrack to Berlin, hit Brussels, visit St. Petersburg and Moscow, skip back over the Atlantic and stop at Boston, New York, DeeCee, Chicago," (Lorel was working up a sweat by then), "drop down to Yucatan, and jump back up to the California territory."

"In that order?" I asked.

"Pretty much so," he said.

"What's wrong with India and the Middle East—or the Far East, for that matter?" asked a voice which I recognized as Phil's. He had come in after the lights went down low.

"Nothing," said Myshtigo, "except that it's mainly mud and sand and hot, and has nothing to do with what I'm after."

What *are* you after?"

"A story."

"What kind of story?"

"I'll send you an autographed copy."

"Thanks."

"Your pleasure."

"When do you wish to leave?" I asked him.

"Day after tomorrow," he said.

"Okay."

"I've had detailed maps of the specific sites made up for you. Lorel tells me they were delivered to your office this afternoon."

"Okay again. But there is something of which you may not be fully cognizant. It involves the fact that everything you've named so far is mainlandish. We're pretty much an island culture these days, and for very good reasons. During the Three Days the Mainland got a good juicing, and most of the places you've named are still inclined to be somewhat hot. This, though, is not the only reason they are considered unsafe . . ."

"I am not unfamiliar with your history and I am aware of the radiation precautions," he interrupted. "Also, I am aware of the variety of mutated life forms which inhabit Old Places. I am concerned, but not worried."

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I shrugged in the artificial twilight.

"It's okay by me . . ."

As the screen was sucked upward behind him, Myshtigo asked me:

"Is it true that you are acquainted with several *mambos* and *houngans* here at the Port?"

"Why, yes," said I. "Why?"

"I understand," he said conversationally, "that voodoo, or *voudoun,* has survived pretty much unchanged over the centuries. I should like very much to witness a real ceremony. If I were to attend one with someone who was not a stranger to the participants, perhaps then I could obtain the genuine thing."

"Why should you want to? Morbid curiosity concerning barbaric customs?"

"No. I am a student of comparative religions."

I studied his face, couldn't tell anything from it.

It had been awhile since I'd visited with Mama Julie and Papa Joe or any of the others, and the *hounfor* wasn't that far away, but I didn't know how they'd take to me bringing a Vegan around. They'd never objected when I'd brought people, of course.

"Well . . ." I began.

"I just want to watch," he said. "I'll stay out of the way. They'll hardly know I'm there."

I mumbled a bit and finally gave in. I knew Mama Julie pretty well and I didn't see any real harm being done, no matter what.

So, "Okay," said I, "I'll take you to one. Tonight, if you like."

He agreed, thanked me, and went off after a Coke. George, who had not strayed from the arm of my chair, leaned toward me and observed that it would be very interesting to dissect a Vegan. I agreed with him.

When Myshtigo returned, Dos Santos was at his side.

"What is this about you taking Mister Myshtigo to a pagan ceremony?" he asked, nostrils flared and quivering.

"That's right," I said, "I am."

"Not without a bodyguard you are not."

I turned both palms upward.

"I am capable of handling anything which might arise."

"Hasan and I will accompany you."

I was about to protest when Ellen insinuated herself between them.

"I want to go, too," she said. "I've never been to one."

I shrugged. If Dos Santos went, then Diane would go, too, which made for quite a few of us.

So one more wouldn't matter, shouldn't matter. It was ruined before it got started.

The *hounfor* was located down in the harbor section, possibly because it was dedicated to Agué Woyo, god of the sea. More likely

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though, it was because Mama Julie's people had always been harbor people. Agué Woyo is not a jealous god, so lots of other deities are commemorated upon the walls in brilliant colors. There are more elaborate *hounfors* further inland, but they tend to be somewhat commercial.

Agué's big blazeboat was blue and orange and green and yellow and black, and it looked to be somewhat unseaworthy. Damballa Wedo, crimson, writhed and coiled his length across most of the opposite wall. Several big *rada* drums were being stroked rhythmically by Papa Joe, forward and to the right of the door through which we entered—the only door. The small altar bore numerous bottles of alcoholic beverages, gourds, sacred vessels for the spirits of the *loa,* charms, pipes, flags, depth photos of unknown persons and, among other things, a pack of cigarettes for Papa Legba.

A service was in progress when we were led in by a young *hounsi* named Luis. The room was about eight meters long and five wide, had a high ceiling, a dirt floor. Dancers moved about the central pole with slow, strutting steps. Their flesh was dark and it glistened in the dim light of the antique kerosene lamps. With our entry the room became crowded.

Mama Julie took my hand and smiled. She led me back to a place beside the altar and said, "Erzulie was kind."

I nodded.

"She likes you, Nomiko. You live long, you travel much, and you come back."

"Always," I said.

"Those people . . . ?"

She indicated my companions with a flick of her dark eyes.

"Friends. They would be no bother . . ."

She laughed as I said it. So did I.

"I will keep them out of your way if you let us remain. We will stay in the shadows at the sides of the room. If you tell me to take them away, I will. I see that you have already danced much, emptied many bottles . . ."

"Stay," she said. "Come talk with me during daylight sometime."

"I will."

She moved away then and they made room for her in the circle of dancers. She was quite large, though her voice was a small thing. She moved like a huge rubber doll, not without grace, stepping to the monotonous thunder of Papa Joe's drumming. After a time this sound filled everything —my head, the earth, the air—like maybe the whale's heartbeat had seemed to half-digested Jonah. I watched the dancers. I watched those who watched the dancers.

I drank a pint of rum in an ef-

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fort to catch up, but I couldn't. Myshtigo kept taking sips of Coke from a bottle he had brought along with him. No one noticed that he was blue, but then we had gotten there rather late and things were pretty well along the way to wherever they were going.

Red Wig stood in a corner looking supercilious and frightened. She was holding a bottle at her side, but that's where it stayed.

Myshtigo was holding Ellen at his side, and that's where she stayed. Dos Santos stood beside the door, watched everybody—even me. Hasan, crouched against the righthand wall, was smoking a long-stemmed pipe with a small bowl. He appeared to be at peace.

Mama Julie, I guess it was, began to sing. Other voices picked it up:

Papa Legba, ouvri bayé!
Papa Legba, Attibon Legba, ouvri baye pou nou passe!
Papa Legba . . .

This went on, and on and on. I began to feel drowsy. I drank more rum and felt thirstier and drank more rum.

I'm not sure how long we had been there when it happened. The dancers had been kissing the pole and singing and rattling gourds and pouring out waters, and a couple of the *hounsi* were acting possessed and talking incoherently, and the meal-design on the floor was all blurred, and there was lots of smoke in the air, and I was leaning back against the wall and I guess my eyes had been closed for a minute or two.

The sound came from an unexpected quarter.

Hasan screamed.

It was a long, wailing thing that brought me forward, then dizzily off balance, then back to the wall again, with a thump.

The drumming continued, not missing a single beat. Some of the dancers stopped though, staring.

Hasan had gotten to his feet. His teeth were bared and his eyes were slits, and his face bore the ridges and valleys of exertion beneath its sheen of sweat.

His beard was a fireshot spearhead.

His cloak, caught high against some wall decoration, was black wings.

His hands, in a hypnosis of slow motion, were strangling a non-existent man.

Animal sounds came from his throat.

He continued to choke nobody.

Finally, he chuckled and his hands sprang open.

Dos Santos was at his side almost immediately, talking to him, but they inhabited two different worlds.

One of the dancers began to moan softly. Another joined him—and others.

Mama Julie detached herself from the circle and came toward me—just as Hasan started the

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whole thing over again, this time with more elaborate histrionics.

The drum continued its steady, earthdance pronouncement.

Papa Joe did not even look up.

"A bad sign," said Mama Julie. "What do you know of this man?"

"Plenty," said I, forcing my head clear by an act of will.

"Angelsou," said she.

"What?"

"Angelsou," she repeated. "He is a dark god—one to be feared. Your friend is possessed by Angelsou."

"Explain, please."

"He comes seldom to our *hounfor*. He is not wanted here. Those he possesses become murderers."

"I think Hasan was trying a new pipe mixture—mutant ragweed or something."

"Angelsou," she said it again. "Your friend will become a killer, for Angelsou is a deathgod, and he only visits with his own."

"Mama Julie," said I, "Hasan *is* a killer. If you had a piece of gum for every man he's killed and you tried to chew it all, you'd look like a chipmunk. He is a professional killer—within the limits of the law, usually. Since the Code Duello prevails on the Mainland, he does most of his work there. It has been rumored that he does an illegal killing on occasion, but this thing has never been proved."

Dos Santos then, trying to stop the show, seized both Hasan's wrists. He tried to pull his hands apart, but—well, try bending the bars of your cage sometime and you'll get the picture.

I crossed the room, as did several of the others. This proved fortunate, because Hasan had finally noticed that someone was standing in front of him and dropped his hands, freeing them. Then he produced a long-bladed stilleto from under his cloak.

Whether or not he would actually have used it on Don or anybody else is a moot point, because at that moment Myshtigo stoppered his Coke bottle with his thumb and hit him behind the ear with it. Hasan fell forward and Don caught him, and I pried the blade from between the fingers.

"Interesting ceremony," observed the Vegan, "I would never have suspected that big fellow of harboring such strong religious feelings."

"It just goes to show that you can never be too sure, doesn't it?"

After I'd apologized and said good-night, I picked up Hasan. He was out cold and I was the only one big enough to carry him.

The street was deserted except for us, and Agué Woyo's big blazeboat was cutting the waves somewhere just under the eastern edge of the world and splashing the sky with all his favorite colors.

Hasan moaned just then and flexed his muscles and I felt a sharp pain in my shoulder.

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I set him down on a doorstep and shook him down. I found two throwing knives, another stilleto, a very neat gravity knife, a saw-edged Bowie, strangling wires, and a small metal case containing various powders and vials of liquids which I did not care to inspect too closely. I liked the gravity knife, so I kept it for myself. It was a Coricama, and very neat.

Late the next day—call it evening—I shanghaied old Phil, determined to use him as the price of admission to Dos Santos' suite at the *Royal*. The Radpol still reveres Phil as a sort of Returnist Tom Paine, even though he began pleading innocent to that about half a century ago, back when he began getting mysticism and respectability. While his *Call of Earth* probably *is* the best thing he'd ever written, he also drafted the Articles of Return, which helped to start the trouble I'd wanted started. He may do much disavowing these days, but he was a troublemaker then, and I'm sure he still files away all the fawning gazes and bright words it continues to bring him, takes them out every now and then, dusts them off, and regards them with something like pleasure.

Besides Phil, I took along a pretext—that I wanted to see how Hasan was feeling after the lamentable bash he'd received at the *hounfor*. Actually now, what I wanted was a chance to talk to Hasan and find out how much, if anything, he'd be willing to tell me about his latest employment.

So Phil and I walked it. It wasn't far from the Office compound to the *Royal*. About seven minutes, ambling.

"Why are you suddenly concerned with the Radpol again?" he asked. "It's been a long time since you left."

"I left at the proper time, and all I'm concerned with is whether it's coming alive again—like in the old days. Hasan comes high because he always delivers, and I want to know what's in the package."

"Are you worried they've found you out?"

"No. It might be uncomfortable, but I doubt it would be incapacitating."

The *Royal* loomed before us and we entered. We went directly to the suite. As we walked up the padded hallway, Phil, in a fit of perception, observed: "I'm running interference again."

"That about says it."

"Okay. One'll get you ten you find out nothing."

"I won't take you up on that. You're probably right."

I knocked on the darkwood door.

"Come in, come in."

It took me ten minutes to turn the conversation to the lamenta-

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ble bashing of the Bedouin, as Red Wig was there distracting me by being there and being distracting.

"Good morning," she said.

"Good evening," I said.

"Anything new happening in Arts?"

"No."

"Monuments?"

"No."

"Archives?"

"No."

"What interesting work you must do!"

"Oh, it's been overpublicized and glamorized all out of shape by a few romanticists in the Information Office. Actually, all we do is locate, restore, and preserve the records and artifacts mankind has left lying about the Earth."

"Sort of like cultural garbage collectors?"

"Mm, yes. I think that's properly put."

"Well, why?"

"Why what?"

"Why do you do it?"

"Someone has to, because it's cultural garbage. That makes it worth collecting. I know my garbage better than anyone else on Earth."

"You're dedicated, as well as being modest. That's good, too."

"Yeah. How is Hasan progressing? The last time I saw him he had stopped entirely."

"Up, around. Big lump. Thick skull. No harm."

"Where is he?"

"Up the hall, left. Games Room."

"I believe I'll go render him my sympathy. Excuse me?"

"Excused," she said, nodding, and she went away to listen to Dos Santos talk at Phil. Phil, of course, welcomed the addition.

Neither looked up as I left.

The Games Room was at the other end of the long hallway. As I approached, I heard a *thunk* followed by a silence, followed by another *thunk*.

I opened the door and looked inside.

He was the only one there. His back was to me, but he heard the door open and turned quickly. He was wearing a long purple dressing gown and was balancing a knife in his right hand. There was a big wad of plastage on the back of his head.

"Good evening, Hasan."

A tray of knives stood at his side, and he had set a target upon the opposite wall. Two blades were sticking into the target—one in the center and one about six inches off, at nine o'clock.

"Good evening," he said slowly. Then, after thinking it over, "How are you?"

"Oh, fine. I came to ask you that same question. How is your head?"

"The pain is great, but it shall pass."

I closed the door behind me.

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"You must have been having quite a daydream last night."

"Yes. Mister Dos Santos tells me I fought with ghosts. I do not remember."

"You weren't smoking what the fat Doctor Emmet would call Cannabis sativa, that's for sure."

"No, Karagee. I smoked a strige-fleur which had drunk human blood. I found it near the Old Place of Constantinople and dried its blossoms carefully. An old woman told me it would give me sight into the future. She lied."

". . . And the vampire-bloom incites to violence? Well, that's a new one to write down. By the way, you just called me Karagee. I wish you wouldn't. My name is Nomikos, Conrad Nomikos."

"Yes, Karagee. I was surprised to see you. I had thought you died long ago, when your blazeboat broke up in the bay."

"Karagee did die then. You have not mentioned to anyone that I resemble him, have you?"

"No, I do not make idle talk."

"That is a good habit."

I crossed the room, selected a knife, weighed it, threw it and laid it about ten inches to the right of center. "Have you been working for Mister Dos Santos very long?" I asked him.

"For about the period of a month," he replied.

He threw his knife. It struck five inches below the center.

"You are his bodyguard, eh?"

"That is right. I also guard the blue one."

"Don says he fears an attempt on Myshtigo's life. Is there an actual threat, or is he just being safe?"

"It is possible either way, Karagee. I do not know. He pays me only to guard."

"If I paid you more, would you tell me whom you've been hired to kill?"

"I have only been hired to guard, but I would not tell you even if it were otherwise."

"I didn't think so. Let's go get the knives."

We crossed and drew the blades from the target.

"Now, if it happens to be me—which is possible" I offered, "why don't we settle it right now? We are each holding two blades. The man who leaves this room will say that the other attacked him and that it was a matter of self-defense. There are no witnesses. We were both seen drunk or disorderly last night."

"No, Karagee."

"No, what? No, it isn't me? Or no, you don't want to do it that way?"

"I could say no, it is not you. But you would not know whether I spoke the truth or not."

"That is true."

"I could say I do not want to do it that way."

"Is that true?"

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"I do not say. But to give you the satisfaction of an answer, what I will say is this: If I wished to kill you, I would not attempt it with a knife in my hand, nor would I box nor wrestle with you."

"Why is that?"

"Because many years ago when I was a boy I worked at the Resort of Kerch, attending at the tables of the wealthy Vegans. You did not know me then. I had just come up from the places of Pamir. You and your friend the poet came to Kerch."

"I remember now. Yes . . . Phil's parents had died that year—they were good friends of mine—and I was going to take Phil to the university. But there was a Vegan who had taken his first woman from him, taken her to Kerch. Yes, the entertainer—I forget his name."

"He was Thrilpai Ligo, the shajadpa-boxer, and he looked like a mountain at the end of a great plain—high, immovable. He boxed with the Vegan cesti—the leather straps with the ten sharpened studs that go all the way around the hand—open-handed."

"Yes, I remember . . ."

"You had never boxed shajadpa before, but you fought with him for the girl. A great crowd came, of the Vegans and the Earth girls, and I stood on a table to watch. After a minute your head was all blood. He tried to make it run into your eyes, and you kept shaking your head. I was fifteen then and had only killed three men myself and I thought that you were going to die because you had not even touched him. And then your right hand crossed to him like a thrown hammer, so fast! You struck him in the center of that double bone the blue ones have in their chests—and they are tougher there than we—and you crushed him like an egg. I could never have done that, I am sure—and that is why I fear your hands and your arms. Later, I learned that you had also broken a spider-bat. —No, Karagee, I would kill you from a distance."

"That was so long . . . I did not think anyone remembered."

"You won the girl."

"Yes. I forget her name."

"But you did not give her back to the poet. You kept her for yourself. That is why he probably hates you."

"Phil? That girl? I've even forgotten what she looked like."

"He has never forgotten. That is why I think he hates you. I can smell hate, sniff out its sources. You took away his first woman. I was there."

"It was her idea."

". . . And he grows old and you stay young. It is sad, Karagee, when a friend has reason to hate a friend."

"Yes."

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"And I do not answer your questions."

"It is possible that you were hired to kill the Vegan."

"It is possible."

"Why?"

"I said only that it is possible, not that it is fact."

"Then I will ask you one more question only and be done with it.—What good would come of the Vegan's death? His book could be a very good thing in the way of Vegan-human relations."

"I do not know what good or bad would come of it, Karagee. Let us throw more knives."

We did. I picked up the range and the balance and put two right in the center of the target. Then Hasan squeezed two in beside them, the last one giving out the sharp pain-cry of metal as it vibrated against one of mine.

"I will tell you a thing," I said, as we drew them again. "I am head of the tour and responsible for the safety of its members. I too, will guard the Vegan."

"That will be a very good thing, Karagee. He needs protecting."

I placed the knives back in the tray and moved to the door.

"We will be leaving at nine tomorrow morning, you know. I'll have a convoy of Skimmers at the first field in the Office compound."

"Yes. Good night, Karagee."

". . . And call me Conrad."

"Yes."

He had a knife ready to throw at the target. I closed the door and moved back up the corridor. As I went, I heard another *thunk* and it sounded much closer than the first ones had. It echoed all around me, there in the hallway.

* * *

As the six big Skimmers fled across the oceans towards Egypt I turned my thoughts first to Kos and Cassandra and then dragged them back with some difficulty and sent them on ahead to the land of sand, the Nile, mutated crocs, and some dead Pharaohs whom one of my most current projects was then disturbing ("Death comes on swift wings to he who defiles . . ." etc.), and I thought then of humanity, roughly ensconced on the Titan waystation, working in the Earthoffice, abasing itself on Taler and Bakab, getting by on Mars, and doing so-so on Rylpah, Divbah, Litan, and a couple dozen other worlds in the Vegan Combine. Then I thought about the Vegans.

The blueskinned folk with the funny names and the dimples like pock-marks had taken us in when we were cold, fed us when we were hungry. Yeah. They appreciated the fact that our Martian and Titanian colonies had suffered from nearly a century of sudden self-sufficiency—after the Three Days incident—before a workable interstellar vehicle had

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been developed. Like the boll weevil (Emmet tells me) we were just looking for a home, because we'd used up the one we had. Did the Vegans reach for the insecticide? No. Wise elder race that they are, they permitted us to settle among their worlds, to live and work in their land cities, their seacities. For even a culture as advanced as the Vegans' has some need for hand labor of the opposing thumb variety. Good domestic servants cannot be replaced by machines, nor can machine monitors, good gardeners, salt sea fisherfolk, subterranean and subaquean hazard workers, and ethnic entertainers of the alien variety. Admitted, the presence of human dwelling places lowers the value of adjacent Vegan properties, but then humans themselves compensate for it by contributing to the greater welfare. Which thought brought me back to Earth. The Vegans had never seen a completely devastated civilization before, so they are fascinated by our home planet. Fascinated enough to tolerate our absentee government on Taler. Enough to buy Earthtour tickets to view the ruins. Even enough to buy property here and set up resorts. There *is* a certain kind of fascination to a planet that is run like a museum. (What was it James Joyce said about Rome?) Anyhow, dead Earth still brings its living grandchildren a small but appreciable revenue every Vegan fiscal year. That is why—the Office, Lorel, George, Phil and all that.

Far below, the ocean was a bluegray rug being pulled out from beneath us. The dark continent replaced it. We raced on toward New Cairo.

We set down outside the city. There's no real airstrip. We just dropped all six Skimmers down in an empty field we used as one; and we posted George as a guard.

Old Cairo is still radioactively hot, but the people with whom one can do business live mainly in New Cairo so things were pretty much okay for the tour. Myshtigo did want to see the mosque of Kait Bey in the City of the Dead, which had survived the Three Days; he settled though, for me taking him up in my Skimmer and flying in low, slow circles about it while he took photographs and did some peering. In the way of monuments, it was really the pyramids and Luxor, Karnak, and the Valley of Kings and the Valley of Queens that he wanted to see.

It was well that we viewed the mosque from the air. Dark shapes scurried below us, stopping only to hurl rocks up toward the ship.

"What are they?" asked Myshtigo.

"Hot Ones," said I. "Sort of human. They vary in size, shape and meanness."

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After circling for a time he was satisfied, and we returned to the field.

So, landing again beneath a glaring sun, we secured the final Skimmer and disembarked, moving across equal proportions of sand and broken pavement—two temporary tour assistants, me, Myshtigo, Dos Santos and Red Wig, Ellen, Hasan. Ellen had de cided at the last minute to accompany her husband on the journey. There were fields of high, shiny sugar cane on both sides of the road. In a moment we had left them behind and were passing the low outbuildings of the city. The road widened. Here and there a palm tree cast some shade. Two great-eyed, brown-eyed children looked up as we passed. They had been watching a weary, six-legged cow turn a great *sakieh* wheel, in much the same way as cows have always turned great *sakieh* wheels hereabouts, only this one left more hoofprints.

My area supervisor, Rameses Smith, met us at the inn. He was big, his golden face tightly contained within a fine net of wrinkles; and he had the typical sad eyes, but his constant chuckle quickly offset them.

We sat sipping beer in the main hall of the inn while we waited for George. Local guards had been sent to relieve him.

"The work is progressing well," Rameses told me.

"Good," said I, somewhat pleased that no one had asked me what "the work" was. I wanted to surprise them.

"How is your wife, and the children . . . ?"

"They are fine," he stated.

". . . The new one?"

"He has survived—and without defect," he said proudly. "I sent my wife to Corsica until he was delivered. Here is his picture."

I pretended to study it, making the expected appreciative noises. Then, "Speaking of pictures," I said "do you need any more equipment for the filming?"

"No, we are well-stocked. All goes well. When do you wish to view the work?"

"Just as soon as we have something to eat."

"Are you a Moslem?" interrupted Myshtigo.

"I am of the Coptic faith," replied Rameses, not smiling.

"Oh, really? That was the Monophysite heresy, was it not?"

"We do not consider ourselves heretics."

"About your book, Srin Shtigo . . ." I interrupted.

My use of the honorific stopped him.

"Yes?" he answered.

"My impression," said I, "is that you do not wish to discuss it at any length at this time. I respect this feeling of course, but it places me in a slightly awkward position as head of this tour." We

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both knew I should have asked him in private, especially after his reply to Phil at the reception, but I was feeling cantankerous and wanted to let him know it, as well as to rechannel the talk. So, "I'm curious," I said, "whether it will be primarily a travelogue of the places we visit, or if you would like assistance in directing your attention to special local conditions of any sort—say, political, or current cultural items."

"I am primarily interested in writing a descriptive travel-book" he said, "but I will appreciate your comments as we go along. I thought that was your job, anyway. As it is, I do have a general awareness of Earth traditions and current affairs, and I'm not very much concerned with them."

Dos Santos, who was pacing and smoking as our meal was being prepared, stopped in midstride and said:

"Srin Shtigo, what are your feelings toward the Returnist movement? Are you sympathetic with our aims? —Or do you consider it a dead issue?"

"Yes," he replied, "to the latter. I believe that when one is dead one's only obligation then is to satisfy the consumer. I respect your aims but I do not see how you can possibly hope to realize them. Why should your people give up the security they now possess to return to this place? Most of the members of the present generation have never even seen the Earth, except on tapes—and you must admit that they are hardly the most encouraging documents."

"I disagree with you," said Dos Santos, "and I find your attitude dreadfully patrician."

"That is as it should be," replied Myshtigo.

High sun, short shadows, hot—that's how it was. I didn't want any sand-cars or Skimmers spoiling the scene, so I made everybody hike it. It wasn't that far, and I took a slightly roundabout way in order to achieve the calculated effect.

We walked a crooked mile, climbing some, dipping some. I confiscated George's butterfly net so as to prevent any annoying pauses as we passed by the several clover fields which lay along our route.

Walking backwards through time, that's how it was—with bright birds flashing by (*clare! clare!*), and a couple camels appearing against the far horizon whenever we topped a small rise. Ellen, moist already, kept fanning herself with a big green feather triangle; Red Wig walked tall, tiny beads of perspiration seasoning her upper lip, eyes hidden behind sunshades which had darkened themselves as much as they could. Finally, we were there. We climbed the last, low hill.

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"Behold," said Rameses.

"Madre de Dios!" said Dos Santos.

Hasan grunted.

Red Wig turned toward me quickly then, then turned away. I couldn't read her expression because of the shades.

"What are they doing?" asked Myshtigo. It was the first time I had seen him genuinely surprised.

"Why, they are dismantling the great pyramid of Cheops," said I.

After a time Red Wig asked it.

"Why?" she asked.

"Well now," I told her, "they're kind of short on building materials hereabouts, the stuff from Old Cairo being radio-active—so they're obtaining it by knocking apart that old piece of solid geometry out there."

"They are desecrating a monument to the past glories of the human race!" she exclaimed.

"Nothing is cheaper than past glories," I observed. "It's the present that we are concerned with, and they need building materials now."

"For how long has this been going on?" asked Myshtigo, his words rushing together.

"It was three days ago" said Rameses, "that we began the dismantling."

"What gives you the right to do a thing like that?"

"It was authorized by the Earth-office Department of Arts, Monuments and Archives, Srin."

Myshtigo turned to me, his amber eyes glowing strangely.

"You!" he said.

"I," I acknowledged, "am Commissioner thereof—that is correct."

"Why has no one else heard of this action of yours?"

"Because very few people come here anymore," I explained. "—Which is another good reason for dismantling the thing. It doesn't even get looked at much these days."

"I came here from another world to see it!"

"Well, take a quick look then," I told him. "It's going away fast."

He turned and stared.

"You obviously have no conception of its intrinsic value. Or if you do . . ."

"On the contrary, I know exactly what it's worth."

". . . And those unfortunate creatures you have working down there," his voice rose as he studied the scene, "under the hot rays of your ugly sun—they're laboring under the most primitive conditions! Haven't you ever heard of moving machinery?"

"Of course. It's expensive."

"And your foremen are carrying whips! How can you treat your own people that way? It's perverse!"

"All those men volunteered for the job, at token salaries—and Actors' Equity won't let us use the whips, even though the men ar-

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gued in favor of it. All we're allowed to do is crack them in the air near them."

"Actors' Equity?"

"Their union. —Want to see some machinery?" I gestured. "Look up on that hill."

He did.

"What's going on there?"

"We're recording it on viewtape."

"To what end?"

"When we're finished we're going to edit it down to viewable length and run it backwards. 'The Building of the Great Pyramid,' we're going to call it. Should be good for some laughs—also money. Your historians have been conjecturing as to exactly how we put it together ever since the day they heard about it. This may make them somewhat happier. I decided a BFMI operation would go over best."

"B.F.M.I.?"

"Brute Force and Massive Ignorance. Look at them hamming it up, will you?—following the camera, lying down and standing up quickly when it swings in their direction. They'll be collapsing all over the place in the finished product. But then, this is the first Earthfilm in years. They're real excited."

Myshtigo laughed.

"You are tougher than I thought Nomikos," he observed. "But you are not indispensable."

"Try having a civil servant fired."

"It might be easier than you think."

"We'll see."

"We may."

We turned again toward the great 90 percent pyramid of Cheops/Khufu. Myshtigo began taking notes once more.

"I'd rather you viewed it from here, for now," I said. "Our presence would waste valuable footage. We're anachronisms. We can go down during coffee break."

"I agree," said Myshtigo, "and I am certain I know an anachronism when I see one. But I have seen all that I care to here. Let us go back to the inn. I wish to talk with the locals."

Then, "I'll see Sakkara ahead of schedule, then," he mused. "You haven't began dismantling all the monuments of Luxor, Karnak, and the Valley of Kings yet have you?"

"Not yet, no."

"Good. Then we'll visit them ahead of time."

"Do you really mean everything you say?" asked Diane as we walked back.

"In my fashion."

"How do you think of such things?"

"In Greek, of course. Then I translate them into English. I'm real good at it."

"Who are you?"

"Ozymandias. Look on my works ye mighty and despair."

"I'm not mighty."

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"I wonder . . ." I said, and I left the part of her face that I could see wearing a rather funny expression as we walked along.

The next six days were rather eventful and somewhat unforgettable, extremely active, and sort of ugly-beautiful—in the way that a flower can be, with its petals all intact and a dark and runny rot-spot in the center. Here's how . . .

Myshtigo must have interviewed every stone ram along the four miles of the Way to Karnak. Both in the blaze of day and by torchlight we navigated the ruins, disturbing bats, rats, snakes and insects, listening to the Vegan's monotonous note-taking in his monotonous language. At night we camped on the sands, setting up a two hundred meter electrical warning perimeter and posting two guards. The boadile has a head something like a croc's, only bigger. Around forty feet long. Able to roll itself into a big beach-ball with teeth. Fast on land or in water. But the boadile is cold-blooded and the nights were chill. So there was relatively little danger from without.

Huge campfires lighted the nights, all about the areas we chose, because the Vegan wanted things primitive—for purposes of atmosphere, I guessed. Our Skimmers were further south. We had flown them to a place I knew of and left them there under Office guard, renting the felucca for our trip—which paralleled the King-God's journey from Karnak to Luxor. Myshtigo had wanted it that way. Nights, Hasan would either practice with the *assagai* he had bartered from a big Nubian or he would strip to the waist and wrestle for hours with his tireless robot-golem. A worthy opponent was the rolem. Hasan had it programmed at twice the statistically-averaged strength of a man and had upped its reflex-time by fifty percent. Its "memory" contained hundreds of wrestling holds, and its governor theoretically prevented it from killing or maiming its opponent—all through a series of chemelectrical afferent nerve-analogues which permitted it to gauge to an ounce the amount of pressure necessary to snap a bone or tear a tendon. Rolem was about five feet, six inches in height and weighed around two hundred fifty pounds; manufactured on Bakab, he was quite expensive, was dough-colored and caricature-featured, and his brains were located somewhere below where his navel would be—if golems had navels—to protect his thinkstuff from Greco-Roman shocks. Even as it is, accidents can happen. People have been killed by the things, when something goes amok in the brains or some of the afferents, or just because the people themselves slipped or tried to jerk away, sup-

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plying the necessary extra ounces. I'd had one once for almost a year, programmed for boxing. I used to spend fifteen minutes or so with it every afternoon. Got to thinking of it as a person almost. Then one day it fouled me and I pounded it for over an hour and finally knocked its head off. The thing kept right on boxing, and I stopped thinking of it as a friendly sparring partner right then. It's a weird feeling, boxing with a headless golem, you know? —Sort of like waking from a pleasant dream and finding a nightmare crouched at the foot of your bed. It doesn't really "see" its opponent with those eye-things it has; it's all sheathed about with piezoelectric radar mesentery, and it "watches" from all its surfaces. Still, the death of an illusion tends to disconcert. I turned mine off and never turned it back on again. Sold it to a camel trader for a pretty good price. Don't know if he ever got the head back on. But he was a Turk, so who cares?

Anywhich—Hasan would tangle with Rolem, both of them gleaming in the firelight and we'd all sit on blankets and watch, and bats would swoop low occasionally, like big, fast ashes, and emaciated clouds would cover the moon, veil-like, and then move on again. It was that way on that third night, that third night, when I went mad.

I remember it only in the way you remember a passing countryside you might have seen through a late summer evening storm—as a series of isolated lightning-filled still-shots . . .

Having spoken with Cassandra for the better part of an hour, I concluded the transmission with a promise to cop a Skimmer the following afternoon and spend the next night on Kos. I recall our last words.

". . . Take care Konstantin. I have been dreaming bad dreams."

"Bosh, Cassandra. Good night."

And who knows but that her dreams might have been the result of a temporal shockwave moving backwards from a 9.6 Richter reading?

A certain cruel gleam filling his eyes, Dos Santos applauded as Hasan hurled Rolem to the ground with a thunderous crash. That particular earthshaker continued, however, long after the golem had climbed back to his feet and gotten into another crouch, his arms doing serpent-things in the Arab's direction. The ground shook and shook.

"What power! Still do I feel it!" cried Dos Santos. "Ole!"

"It is a seismic disturbance," said George. "Even though I'm not a geologist—"

"Earthquake!" yelled his wife, dropping an unpasturized date she had been feeding Myshtigo.

There was no reason to run, no

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place to run to. There was nothing nearby that could fall on us. The ground was level and pretty barren. So we just sat there and were thrown about, even knocked flat a few times. The fires did amazing things.

Rolem's time was up and he went stiff then, and Hasan came and sat with George and myself. The tremors lasted the better part of an hour, and they came again, more weakly, many times during that night. After the first bad shock had run its course, we got in touch with the Port. The instruments there showed that the center of the thing lay a good distance to the north of us.

A bad distance, really.

. . . In the Mediterranean.

The Aegaean, to be more specific.

I felt sick, and suddenly I was.

I tried to put through a call to Kos.

Nothing.

My Cassandra, my lovely lady my princess . . . Where was she? For two hours I tried to find out. Then the Port called me.

It was Lorel's voice, not just some lob watch operator's.

"Uh—Conrad, I don't know how to tell you, exactly, what happened . . ."

"Just talk," I said, "and stop when you're finished."

"An observe-satellite passed your way about twelve minutes ago," he crackled across the bands. "Several of the Aegaean islands were no longer present in the pictures it transmitted . . ."

"No," I said.

"I'm afraid that Kos was one of them."

"No " I said.

"I'm sorry," he told me, "but that is the way it shows. I don't know what else to say . . ."

"That's enough," I said. "That's all. That's it. Goodbye. We'll talk more later. No! I guess— No!"

"Wait! Conrad!"

I went mad.

Bats, shaken loose from the night, were swooping about me. I struck out with my right hand and killed one as it flashed in my direction. I waited a few seconds and killed another. Then I picked up a big rock with both hands and was about to smash the radio when George laid a hand on my shoulder, and I dropped the rock and knocked his hand away and backhanded him across the mouth. I don't know what became of him then, but as I stooped to raise the rock once more I heard the sound of footfalls behind me. I dropped to one knee and pivotted on it, scooping up a handful of sand to throw in someone's eyes. They were all of them there: Myshtigo and Red Wig and Dos Santos, Rameses, Ellen, three local civil servants, and Hasan—approaching in a group. Someone yelled "Scatter!" when they saw my face, and they fanned out.

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Then they were everyone I'd ever hated—I could feel it. I saw other faces, heard other voices. Everyone I'd ever known, hated, wanted to smash, had smashed, stood there resurrected before the fire, and only the whites of their teeth were showing through the shadows that crossed over their faces as they smiled and came toward me, bearing various dooms in their hands, and soft, persuasive words on their lips—so I threw the sand at the foremost and rushed him.

My uppercut knocked him over backwards, then two Egyptians were on me from both sides.

I shook them loose, and in the corner of my colder eye saw there a great Arab with something like a black avocado in his hand. He was swinging it toward my head, so I dropped down. He had been coming in my direction and I managed to give his stomach more than just a shove, so he sat down suddenly. Then the two men I had thrown away were back on me again. A woman was screaming, somewhere in the distance, but I couldn't see any women.

I tore my right arm free and batted someone with it, and the man went down and another took his place. From straight ahead a blue man threw a rock which struck me on the shoulder and only made me madder. I raised a kicking body into the air and threw it against another, then I hit someone with my fist. I shook myself. My galabieh was torn and dirty, so I tore it the rest of the way off and threw it away.

I looked around. They had stopped coming at me, and it wasn't fair—it wasn't fair that they should stop then when I wanted so badly to see things breaking. So I raised up the man at my feet and slapped him down again. Then I raised him up again and someone yelled "Eh! Karaghiosis!" and began calling me names in broken Greek. I let the man fall back to the ground and turned.

There, before the fire—there were two of them: one tall and beared, the other squat and heavy and hairless and molded out of a mixture of putty and earth.

"My friend says he will break you, Greek!" called out the tall one, as he did something to the other's back.

I moved toward them and the man of putty and mud sprang at me.

He tripped me, but I came up again fast and caught him beneath the armpits and threw him off to the side. But he recovered his footing as rapidly as I had, and he came back again and caught me behind the neck with one hand. I did the same to him, also seizing his elbow—and we locked together there, and he was strong.

Because he was strong, I kept changing holds, testing his strength. He was also fast, accom-

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modating every move I made almost as soon as I thought of it.

I threw my arms up between his, hard, and stepped back on my reinforced leg. Freed for a moment, we orbited each other, seeking another opening.

I kept my arms low and I was bent well forward because of his shortness. For a moment, my arms were too near my sides and he moved in faster than I had seen anyone move before, ever, and he caught me in a body lock that squeezed the big flat flowers of moisture out of my pores and caused a great pain in my sides.

Still his arms tightened, and I knew that it would not be long before he broke me unless I could break his hold.

I doubled my hands into fists and got them against his belly and pushed. His grip tightened. I stepped backwards and heaved forward with both arms. My hands went up higher between us and I got my right fist against the palm of my left hand and began to push them together and lift with my arms. My head swam as my arms came up higher, and my kidneys were on fire. Then I tightened all the muscles in my back and my shoulders and felt the strength flow down through my arms and come together in my hands, and I smashed them up toward the sky and his chin happened to be in the way, but it didn't stop them.

My arms shot up over my head and he fell backward.

It should have broken a man's neck, the force of that big snap that came when my hands struck his chin and he got a look at his heels from the backside.

But he sprang up immediately, anl I knew then that he was no mortal wrestler, but one of those creatures born not of woman; rather, I knew, he had been torn Antaeus-like from the womb of the Earth herself.

I brought my hands down hard on his shoulders and he dropped to his knees. I caught him across the throat then and stepped to his right side and got my left knee under the lower part of his back. I leaned forward, bearing down on his thighs and shoulders, trying to break him.

But I couldn't. He just kept bending until his head touched the ground and I couldn't push him any further.

No one's back bends like that and doesn't snap, but his did.

Then I heaved up with my knee and let go, and he was on me again—that fast.

So I tried to strangle him. My arms were much longer than his. I caught him by the throat with both hands, my thumbs pressing against what should have been his windpipe. He got his arms across mine though, at the elbows and inside, and began to pull downward and out. I kept squeezing,

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waiting for his face to darken, his eyes to bug out. My elbows began to bend under his downward pressure. Then his arms came across and caught me by the throat.

And we stood there and choked one another. Only he wouldn't be strangled.

His thumbs were like two spikes pressing into the muscles in my neck. I felt my face flush. My temples began to throb.

Off in the distance, I heard a scream:

"Stop it, Hasan! It's not supposed to do that!"

It sounded like Red Wig's voice. Anyhow, that's the name that came into my head: Red Wig. Which meant that Donald Dos Santos was somewhere nearby. And she had said "Hasan," a name written on another picture that came suddenly clear.

Which meant that I was Conrad and that I was in Egypt, and that the expressionless face swimming before me was therefore that of the golem-wrestler, Rolem, a creature which could be set for five times the strength of a human being and probably was so set, a creature which could be given the reflexes of an adrenalized cat, and doubtless had them in full operation.

Only a golem wasn't supposed to kill, except by accident, and Rolem was trying to kill me.

Which meant that his governor wasn't functioning.

I released my choke, seeing that it wasn't working, and I placed the palm of my left hand beneath his right elbow. Then I reached across the top of his arms and seized his right wrist with my other hand, and I crouched as low as I could and pushed up on his elbow and pulled up on his wrist.

As he went off balance to his left and the grip was broken I kept hold of the wrist, twisting it so that the elbow was exposed upwards. I stiffened my left hand, snapped it up beside my ear, and brought it down across the elbow joint.

Nothing. There was no snapping sound. The arm just gave way bending backwards at an unnatural angle.

I released the wrist and he fell to one knee. Then he stood again, quickly, and as he did so the arm straightened itself and then bent forward again into a normal position.

If I knew Hasan's mind, then Rolem's timer had been set for maximum—two hours. Which was a pretty long time, all things considered.

But this time around I knew who I was and what I was doing. Also, I knew what went into the structuring of a golem. This one was a wrestling golem. Therefore, it could not box.

I cast a quick look back over my shoulder, to the place where I had

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been standing when the whole thing had started—over by the radio tent. It was about fifty feet away.

He almost had me then. Just during that split second while I had turned my attention to the rear he had reached out and seized me behind the neck with one hand and caught me beneath the chin with the other.

He might have broken my neck, had he been able to follow through, but there came another temblor at that moment—a severe one, which cast us both to the ground—and I broke this hold, also.

I scrambled to my feet seconds later, and the earth was still shaking. Rolem was up too, though, and facing me again.

We were like two drunken sailors fighting on a storm-tossed ship . . .

He came at me and I gave ground.

I hit him with a left jab, and while he snatched at my arm I punched him in the stomach. Then I backed off.

He came on again and I kept throwing punches. Boxing was to him what the fourth dimension is to me—he just couldn't see it. He kept advancing, shaking off my punches, and I kept retreating in the direction of the radio tent, and the ground kept shaking, and somewhere a woman was screaming, and I heard a shouted "Ole!" as I landed a right below the belt, hoping to jar his brains a bit.

Then we were there and I saw what I wanted—the big rock I'd intended to use on the radio. I feinted with my left, then seized him, shoulder-and-thigh, and raised him high up over my head.

I bent backwards, I tightened up my muscles, and then I hurled him down upon the rock.

It caught him in the stomach.

He began to rise again, but more slowly than he had before, and I kicked him in the stomach, three times, with my great reinforced right boot, and I watched him sink back down.

A strange whirring sound had begun in his midsection.

The ground shook again. Rolem crumpled, stretched out, and the only sign of motion was in the fingers of his left hand. They kept clenching and unclenching—reminding me, oddly, of Hasan's hands that night back at the *hounfor.*

Then I turned slowly and they were all standing there: Myshtigo and Ellen, and Dos Santos with a puffed-up cheek, Red Wig, George, Rameses and Hasan, and the three plastaged Egyptians. I took a step toward them then and they began to fan out again, their faces filling with fear. But I shook my head.

"No, I'm all right now," I said, "but leave me alone. I'm going

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down to the river to bathe . . ." and I took seven steps and then someone must have pulled out the plug, because I gurgled, everything swirled, and the world ran away down the drain.

The days that followed were ashes and the nights were iron. The spirit that had been torn from my soul was buried deeper than any mummy that lay mouldering beneath those sands. It is said that the dead forget the dead in the house of Hades, Cassandra, but I hoped it was not so. I went through the motions of conducting a tour, and Lorel suggested that I appoint someone else and take a leave of absence myself.

I couldn't.

What would I do then? —Sit and brood in some Old Place, cadging drinks from unwary travelers? No. Some kind of motion is always essential at such times; its forms eventually generate a content for their empty insides. So I went on with the tour and turned my attention to the small mysteries it contained.

I took Rolem apart and studied his governor. It *had* been broken, of course—which meant that either I had done it during the early stages of our conflict, or Hasan had done it as he was souping him up to take the fight out of me. If Hasan had done it, then he did not just want me beaten, but dead. If such was the case, then the question was *why?* I wondered whether his employer knew that I had once been Karaghiosis. If he did though, why should he want to kill the founder and first Secretary of his own Party?—the man who had sworn that he would not see the Earth sold out from under him and turned into a sporting house by a pack of blue aliens—not see it without fighting, anyhow—and had organized about himself a cabal which systematically lowered the value of all Vegan-owned Terran property to zero, and even went so far as to raze the Talerites' lush realty office on Madagascar—the man whose ideals he allegedly espoused, though they were currently being channeled into more peaceful, legalistic modes of property-defense—why should he want *that* man dead?

—Therefore, he had either sold out the Party or he didn't know who I was and had had some other end in mind when he instructed Hasan to kill me.

Or else Hasan was acting under someone else's orders.

But who else could there be? And again why? I had no answer. I decided I wanted one.

The first condolence had been George's.

"I'm sorry, Conrad," he'd said, looking past my elbow, and then down at the sand, and then glancing up quickly into my face.

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Saying human things upset him, and made him want to go away. I could tell. It is doubtful that the parade consisting of Ellen and myself, which had passed that previous summer, had occupied much of his attention. His passions stopped outside the biological laboratory. I remember when he'd dissected the last dog on Earth. After four years of scratching his ears and combing the fleas from his tail and listening to him bark, George had called Rolf to him one day. Rolf had trotted in, bringing along the old dishrag they'd always played at tug-of-war with, and George tugged him real close and gave him a hypo and then opened him up. He wanted to get him while he was still in his prime. Has the skeleton mounted in his lab. He also wanted to raise his kids—Mark and Dorothy and Jim—in Skinner Boxes, but Ellen had put her foot down each time (like *bang! bang! bang!*) in post-pregnancy seizures of motherhood which lasted just long enough to spoil the initial stimuli-balances George had wanted to establish. So I couldn't really see him as having much desire to take my measure for a wooden sleeping bag of the underground sort. If he'd wanted me dead, it would probably have been subtle, fast, and exotic—with something like Divban rabbit-venom. But no, he didn't care that much. I was sure.

Ellen herself, while she is capable of intense feelings, is ever the faulty windup doll. Something always goes *sprong* before she can take action on her feelings and by the next day she feels as strongly about something else. Her condolence went something like this:

"Conrad, you just don't know how sorry I am! *Really*. Even though I never met her, I *know* how you must feel," and her voice went up and down the scale, and I knew she believed what she was saying, and I thanked her too.

Hasan, though, came up beside me while I was standing there, staring out over the suddenly swollen and muddy Nile. We stood together for a time and then he said, "Your woman is gone and your heart is heavy. Words will not lighten the weight, and what is written is written. But let it also be put down that I grieve with you." Then we stood there awhile longer and he walked away.

I didn't wonder about him. He was the one person who could be dismissed, even though his hand had set the machine in motion. He never held grudges; he never killed for free. He had no personal motive to kill me. That his condolences were genuine, I was certain. Killing me would have nothing to do with the sincerity of his feelings in a matter like this. A true professional must respect some sort of boundary between self and task.

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Myshtigo said no words of sympathy. It would have been alien to his nature. Among the Vegans, death is a time of rejoicing. On the spiritual level it means *sagl*—completion—the fragmentation of the psyche into little pleasure-sensing pinpricks, which are scattered all over the place to participate in the great universal orgasm; and on the material plane it is represented by *ansakundabad't*—ceremonial auditing of most of the deceased's personal possessions, the reading of his distribution-desire and the division of his wealth, accompanied by much feasting, singing, and drinking.

Dos Santos said to me: "It is a sad thing that has happened to you, my friend. It is to lose the blood of one's own veins to lose one's woman. Your sorrow is great and you cannot be comforted. It is like a smouldering fire that will not die out, and it is a sad and terrible thing.

"Death is cruel and it is dark" he finished, and his eyes were moist—for be it Gypsy, Jew, Moor, or what have you, a victim is a victim to a Spaniard, a thing to be appreciated on one of those mystically obscure levels which I lack.

Then Red Wig came up beside me and said, "Dreadful . . . Sorry. Nothing else to say, to do, but sorry."

I nodded.

"Thanks."

"And there is something I must ask you. Not now though. Later."

"Sure," I said, and I returned to watching the river after they left, and I thought about those last two. They had sounded as sorry as everyone else, but it seemed they had to be mixed up in the golem business, somehow. I was sure, though, that it was Diane who had screamed while Rolem was choking me, screamed for Hasan to stop him. That left Don, and I had by then come to entertain strong doubts that he ever did anything without first consulting her.

Which left nobody.

And there was no real motive apparent . . .

And it could all have been an accident . . .

But . . .

But I had this feeling—down there around the stomach, where feelings come from—I had this feeling that someone wanted to kill me. I knew that Hasan was not above taking two jobs at the same time, and for different employers, if there was no conflict of interests.

And this made me happy.

It gave me a purpose, something to do.

There's really nothing quite like someone's wanting you dead to make you want to go on living. I would find him, find out why, and stop him.

Death's second pass was fast,

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and as much as I would have liked to have pinned it on an human agent, I couldn't. It was just one of those diddles of dumb destiny which sometimes come like uninvited guests at dinnertime. Its finale, however, left me quite puzzled and gave me some new confusing thoughts to think.

It came like this . . .

Down by the river, that great fertile flooder, that eraser of boundaries and father of plane geometry, sat the Vegan, making sketches of the opposite bank. I suppose had he been on *that* bank he would have been sketching the one he sat upon, but this is cynical conjecture. What bothered me was the fact that he had come off alone, down to this warm, marshy spot, had not told anyone where he was going, and had brought along nothing more lethal than a No. 2 pencil.

It happened.

An old, mottled log which had been drifting in near the shore suddenly ceased being an old, mottled log. A long, serpentine back end whipped skyward, a bushel full of teeth appeared at the other end, and lots of little legs found solid ground and started acting like wheels.

I yelled and snatched at my belt.

Myshtigo dropped his pad and bolted.

It was on him though, and I couldn't fire then.

So I made a dash, but by the time I got there it had two coils around him and he was about two shades bluer, and those teeth were closing in on him.

Now, there is one way to make any kind of constrictor loosen up, at least for a moment. I grabbed for its high head, which had slowed down just a bit as it contemplated its breakfast, and I managed to catch my fingers under the scaley ridges at the sides of that head.

I dug my thumbs into its eyes as hard as I could.

Then a spastic giant hit me with a graygreen whip.

I picked myself up and I was about ten feet from where I had been standing. Myshtigo had been thrown further up the bank. He was recovering his feet just as it attacked again.

It reared up about eight feet off the ground and toppled toward me. I threw myself to the side and that big, flat head missed me by inches, its impact showering me with dirt and pebbles.

I rolled further and started to rise, but the tail came around and knocked me down again. Then I scrambled backwards but was too late to avoid the coil it threw. It caught me low around the hips and I fell again.

Then a pair of blue arms wrapped themselves around the body above the coil, but they couldn't hold on for more than a

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few seconds. Then we were both tied up in knots.

I struggled, but how do you fight a thick, slippery armored cable with messes of little legs that keep tearing at you? My right arm was pinned to my side by then, and I couldn't reach far enough with my left hand to do any more gouging. The coils tightened. The head moved toward me and I tore at the body. I beat at it and I clawed it, and I finally managed to tear my right arm free, giving up some skin in the process.

I blocked with my right hand as the head descended. My hand came up beneath its lower jaw, caught it, and held it there, keeping the head back. The big coil tightened around my waist, more powerful than even the grip of the golem had been. Then it shook its head sidewards, away from my hand, and the head came down and the jaws opened wide.

Myshtigo's struggles must have irritated it and slowed it some, giving me time for my last defense.

I thrust my hands up into its mouth and held its jaws apart.

The roof of its mouth was slimy and my palm began to slip along it, slowly. I pressed down harder on the lower jaw, as hard as I could. The mouth opened another half foot and seemed locked there.

It tried to draw back then, to make me let go, but its coils bound us too tightly to give it the necessary footage.

So it unwound a little, straightening some, and pulling back its head. I gained a kneeling position. Myshtigo was in a sagging crouch about six feet away from me.

My right hand slipped some more, almost to the point where I would lose all my leverage.

Then I heard a great cry.

The shudder came almost simultaneously. I snapped my arms free as I felt the thing's strength wane for a second. There was a dreadful clicking of teeth and a final constriction. I blacked out for a moment.

Then I was fighting free, untangling myself. The smooth wooden shaft which had skewered the boadile was taking the life from it, and its movements suddenly became spasmodic rather than aggressive.

I was knocked down twice by all its lashing about, but I got Myshtigo free, and we got about fifty feet away and watched it die. This took quite awhile.

Hasan stood there, expressionless. The assagai he had spent so much time practicing with had done its work. When George dissected the creature later we learned that the shaft had lodged within two inches of its heart, severing the big artery. It had two dozen legs.

Dos Santos stood beside Hasan

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and Diane stood beside Dos Santos. Everyone else from the camp was there.

"Good show," I said, "fine shot. Thanks."

"It was nothing," Hasan replied.

It was nothing, he had said. Nothing but the death blow to my notion that he had gimmicked the golem. If Hasan had tried to kill me then, why should he have saved me from the boadile?

—Unless what he said back at the Port was the overriding truth —the fact that he *had* been hired to protect the Vegan. If that was his main job and killing me was only secondary, then he would have had to save me as a by-product of keeping Myshtigo alive.

—Unless I was just a suspicious old man and Rolem had been damaged some other way.

But those golems are built to last. They're designed to take shocks.

But then . . .

Oh hell. Forget it.

I threw a stone as far as I could, and another. Our Skimmers would be flown up to our campsite the following day and we would take off for Athens, stopping only to drop Rameses and the three others at New Cairo. I was glad I was leaving Egypt, with its must and dust and its dead, half-animal deities. I was already sick of the place.

Then Phil's call came through from the Port, and Rameses called me into the radio tent.

"Yeah?" said I, to the radio.

"Conrad, this is Phil. I am flying to Athens this afternoon. I should like to join you on this leg of your tour, if it is all right with you."

"Surely," I replied. "May I ask why, though?"

"I have decided that I want to see Greece once more. Since you are going to be there it might make it seem a little more like the old days. I'd like to take a last look at some of the Old Places."

"You make it sound rather final."

"Well . . . I've pushed the S-S series about as far as it will go. I fancy I can feel the mainspring running down now. Maybe it will take a few more windings and maybe it won't. At any rate, I want to see Greece again and I feel as if this is my last chance."

"I'm sure you're wrong, but we'll all be dining at the Garden Altar tomorrow evening, around eight."

"Fine. I'll see you then."

"Check."

"Good-bye, Conrad."

"Good-bye."

Late that evening, I armed myself and went looking for some fresh air.

I heard voices as I neared the eastern end of the warning perimeter, so I sat down in darkness,

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resting my back against a largish rock, and tried to eavesdrop. I'd recognized the vibrant diminuendoes of Myshtigo's voice, and I wanted to hear what he was saying.

I couldn't though.

They were a little too far away, and desert acoustics are not always the finest in the world. I sat there straining with that part of me which listens, and it happened as it sometimes does:

I was seated on a blanket beside Ellen and my arm was around her shoulders. My blue arm . . .

The whole thing faded as I recoiled from the notion of being a Vegan, even in a pseudotelepathic wish-fulfillment, and I was back beside my rock once again.

I was lonesome though, and Ellen had seemed softer than the rock, and I was still curious.

So I found myself back there once more, observing . . .

". . . Can't see it from here," he/I/we(?) was/were saying "but Vega is a star of the first magnitude, located in what your people call the constellation Lyra."

"What's it like on Taler?" asked Ellen.

There was a long pause. Then:

"Meaningful things are often the things people are least able to describe. Sometimes though, it is a problem in communicating something for which there is no corresponding element in the person to whom you are speaking. Taler is not like this place. There are no deserts. The entire world is landscaped. But . . . Let me take that flower from your hair. There. Look at it. What do you see?"

"A pretty white flower. That's why I picked it and put it in my hair."

"But it is *not* a pretty white flower. Not to me, anyhow. Your eyes perceive light with wavelengths between about 4000 and 7200 angstrom units. The eyes of a Vegan look deeper into the ultraviolet, for one thing, down to around 3000. We are blind to what you refer to as 'red', but on this 'white' flower I see two colors for which there are no words in your language. My body is covered with patterns you cannot see, but they are close enough to those of the others in my family so that another Vegan, familiar with the Shtigo-gens, could tell my family and province on our first meeting. Some of our paintings look garish to Earth eyes, or even seem to be all of one color—blue, usually—because the subtleties are invisible to them. Much of our music would seem to you to contain big gaps of silence, gaps which are actually filled with melody. Our cities are clean and logically disposed. They catch the light of day and hold it long into the night. They are places of slow movement, pleasant sounds. This means much to me, but I do not know how to describe it to a—human."

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"But people—Earth people, I mean—live on your worlds . . ."

"But they do not really see them or hear them or feel them the way we do. There is a gulf we can appreciate and understand, but we cannot really cross it. That is why I cannot tell you what Taler is like. It would be a different world to you than the world it is to me."

"I'd like to see it, though. Very much. I think I'd even like to live there."

"I do not believe you would be happy there."

"Why not?"

"Because non-Vegan immigrants are non-Vegan immigrants. You are not of a low caste here. I know you do not use that term, but that is what it amounts to. Your Office personnel and their families are the highest caste on this planet. Wealthy non-Office persons come next, then those who work for the wealthy non-Office persons, followed by those who make their own living from the land; then, at the bottom, are those unfortunates who inhabit the Old Places. You are at the top here. On Taler you would be at the bottom."

"Why must it be that way?" she asked.

"Because you see a white flower." He handed it back.

There was a long silence and a cool breeze.

"Anyhow, I'm happy you came here," she said.

"It *is* an interesting place."

"Glad you like it."

"It is an interest, not a preoccupation of mine."

"I realize that."

"Was the man called Conrad really your lover?"

I recoiled at the suddenness of the question.

"It's none of your blue business," she said, "but the answer is 'yes'."

"I can see why," he said, and I felt uncomfortable and maybe something like a voyeur, or—subtlety of subtleties—one who watches a voyeur watching.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because you want the strange, the powerful, the exotic, because you are never happy being where you are, what you are."

"That's not true . . . Maybe it is. Yes, he once said something like that to me. Perhaps it is true."

I felt very sorry for her at that moment. Then without realizing it, as I wanted to console her in some way, I reached out and took her hand. Only it was Myshtigo's hand that moved, and he had not willed it to move. I had.

I was afraid suddenly. So was he, though. I could feel it.

There was a great drunk-like, room-swimming feeling, as I felt that he felt *occupied,* as if he had sensed another presence within his mind.

I wanted away quickly then, and I was back there beside my

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rock, but not before she'd dropped the flower and I heard her say, "Hold me!"

Damn those pseudotelepathic wish-fulfillments! Some day I'll stop believing that that's all they are.

I *had* seen two colors in that flower, colors for which I have no words . . .

I walked back toward the camp. I passed through the camp and kept on going. I reached the other end of the warning perimeter, sat down on the ground, lit a cigarette. The night was cool and dark.

Two cigarettes later I heard a voice behind me, but I did not turn.

" 'In the Great House and in the House of Fire, on that Great Day when all the days and years are numbered, oh let my name be given back to me,' " it said.

"Good for you," I said softly, "appropriate quote. I recognize the Book of the Dead when I hear it taken in vain."

"I *wasn't taking it in vain*, just —as you said—appropriately."

"Good for you."

"*On* that great day when all the days and years are numbered, if they do give you back your name, then what name will it be?"

"They won't. I plan on being late. And what's in a name, anyhow?"

"Depends on the name. So try 'Karaghiosis'."

"Try sitting down where I can see you. I don't like to have people standing behind me."

"All right—there. So?"

"So what?"

"So try 'Karaghiosis'."

"Why should I?"

"Because it means something. At least, it did once."

"Karaghiosis was a figure in the old Greek shadow shows, sort of like Punch in the European Punch and Judy plays. He was a slob, he was a buffoon."

"He was Greek, he was subtle."

"Ha! He was half-coward, and he was greasy."

"He was also half-hero.—Cuning. Somewhat gross. Sense of humor. *He'd* tear down a pyramid. Also, he was strong, when he wanted to be."

"Where is he now?"

"I'd like to know."

"Why ask me?"

"Because that is the name Hasan called you on the night you fought the golem."

"Oh . . . I see. Well, it was just an expletive, a generic term, a synonym for fool, a nickname—like if I were to call you 'Red'.—And now that I think of it, I wonder how you look to Myshtigo, anyhow? Vegans are blind to the color of your hair, you know?"

"I don't really care how I look to Vegans. Wonder how you look, though. I understand that Myshtigo's file on you is quite thick. Says something about you being several centuries old."

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"Doubtless an exaggeration. But you seem to know a lot about it. How thick is your file on Myshtigo?"

"Not very, not yet."

"It seems that you hate him more than you hate everyone else. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"He's a Vegan."

"No, there's more."

"You said it, not me."

"Okay, I said it. True though, isn't it?"

"True.—You're quite strong, you know?"

"I know."

"In fact, you're the strongest human being I've ever seen. Strong enough to break the neck of a spiderbat, then fall into the bay at Piraeus and swim ashore and have breakfast."

"Odd example you've chosen."

"Not so, not really. *Did* you?"

"Sorry."

"Sorry is not good enough. Talk more."

"Said all."

"No. We need Karaghiosis."

"Who's 'we'?"

"The Radpol. Me."

"Why, again?"

"Hasan is half as old as Time. Karaghiosis is older. Hasan knew him, remembered, called you 'Karaghiosis'. You *are* Karaghiosis, the killer, the defender of Earth—and we need you now. Very badly. Armageddon has come, not with a bang, but a checkbook. The Vegan must die. There is no alternative. Help us stop him."

"What do you want of me?"

"Let Hasan destroy him."

"No."

"Why not? What is he to you?"

"Nothing, really. In fact, I dislike him very much. But what is he to *you*?"

"Our destroyer."

"Then tell me why, and how, and perhaps I'll give you a better answer."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know."

"Then good night. That's all."

"Wait! I really do not know—but the word has come down from Taler, from the Radpol liason there: He must die. His book is not a book, his self is not a self, but many. I do not know what this means, but our agents have never lied before. You've lived on Taler, you've lived on Bakab and a dozen other worlds. You are Karaghiosis. You know that our agents do not lie, because you are Karaghiosis and you established the spy-circuit yourself. Now you hear their words and you do not heed them. I tell you that they say he must die. He represents the end of everything we've fought for. They say he is a surveyor who must not be permitted to survey. You know the code. Money against Earth. More Vegan exploitation. They could not specify beyond that point."

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"I will not countenance his destruction without a just and specific cause. Thus far, you have shown me nothing."

"That's all I have."

"Then good night."

"Wait. Please."

"Hasan tried to kill me."

"Yes," she said, "He must have thought it easier to kill you than to try keeping you out of the way. After all, he knows more about you than we do."

"Then why did he save me from the boadile today, along with Myshtigo?"

"I'd rather not say."

"Then forget it."

"No, I will tell you.—The *assagai* was the only thing handy. He is not yet proficient with it. He was not aiming to hit the boadile."

"Oh."

"But he was not aiming at you either. The beast was writhing too much. He wanted to kill the Vegan, and he would simply have said that he had tried to save you both, by the only means at hand—and that there had been a terrible accident. Unfortunately, there was no terrible accident. He missed his target."

"Why did he not just let the boadile kill him?"

"Because you had already gotten your hands upon the beast. He feared you might still save him. He fears your hands."

"That's nice to know. Will he continue trying, even if I refuse to cooperate?"

"I'm afraid so."

"That is very unfortunate, my dear, because I will not permit it."

"You will not stop him. Neither will we call him off. Even though you are Karaghiosis, and hurt, and my sorrow for you overflows the horizons, Hasan will not be stopped by you or by me. He *is* Hasan the Assassin. He has never failed."

"Neither have I."

"Yes, you have. You have just failed the Radpol and the Earth, and everything that means anything."

"I keep my own counsel, girl. Go your ways."

"I am old enough to be anyone's grandmother but yours, so do not call me 'girl'. Do you know that my hair is a wig?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that I once contracted a Vegan disease—and that that is why I must wear a wig?"

"No, I am very sorry."

"When I was young, long ago, I worked at a Vegan resort. I was a pleasure girl. I have never forgotten the puffing of their horrid lungs against my body, nor the touch of their corpse-colored flesh. I hate them, Karaghiosis, in ways that only one such as you could understand—one who has hated all the great hates."

"I am sorry, Diane. I am so sorry that it hurts you still. But I am not yet ready to move. Do not push me."

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"You *are* Karaghiosis?"

"Yes."

"Then I am satisfied—somewhat."

"But the Vegan *will* live."

"We shall see."

"Yes, we shall. Good night."

"Good night, Conrad."

And I rose, and I left her there, and I returned to my tent. Later that night she came to me. There was a rustling of the tent flap and the bedclothes, and she was there. And when I have forgotten everything else about her—the redness of her wig and the little upside-down "v" between her eyes, and the tightness of her jaws, and her clipped talk, and all her little mannerisms of gesture, and her body warm as the heart of a star, and her strange indictment of the man I once might have been, I will remember this—that she came to me when I needed her, that she was warm, soft, and that she came to me . . .

After breakfast the following morning I was going to seek Myshtigo, but he found me first. I was down by the river, talking with the men who would be taking charge of the felucca.

"Conrad," he said softly, "may I speak with you?"

I nodded and gestured toward a gully.

"Let's walk up this way. I've finished here."

We walked.

After a minute he said, "You know that on my world there are several systems of mental discipline, systems which occasionally produce extrasensory abilities . . ."

"So I've heard," I said.

"Most Vegans, at sometime or other, are exposed to it. Some have an aptitude along these lines. Many do not. Just about all of us though, possess a feeling for it, a recognition of its operations . . ."

"Yes?"

"I am not telepathic myself, but I am aware that you possess this ability because you used it on me last night. I could feel it. It is quite uncommon among your people, so I had not anticipated this and I had taken no precautions to prevent it. Also, you hit me at about the perfect moment. As a result, my mind was opened to you. I have to know how much you learned."

So there apparently was something extrasensory connected with those sight-vision overlays. All they usually contained were what seemed the immediate perceptions of the subject, plus a peek at the thoughts and feelings that went into the words he made—and sometimes I got them wrong. Myshtigo's question indicated that he did not know how far mine went, and I had heard that some professional Veggy psyche-stirrers could even elbow their way into the unconscious. So I decided to bluff.

"I gather that you are not writ-

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ing a simple travel book," I said.

He said nothing.

"Unfortunately, I am not the only one who is aware of this," I continued, "which places you in a bit of danger."

"Why?" he asked suddenly.

"Perhaps they misunderstand," I ventured.

He shook his head.

"Who are they?"

"Sorry."

"But I need to know."

"Sorry again. If you want out, I can get you back to the Port today."

"No, I can't do that. I must go on. What am I to do?"

"Tell me a little more about it, and I'll make suggestions."

"No, you know too much already . . .

"Then that must be the real reason Donald Dos Santos is here," he said quickly. "He is a moderate. The activist wing of the Radpol must have learned something of this and, as you say—misunderstood. He must know of the danger. Perhaps I should go to him . . ."

"No," I said quickly, "I don't think you should. It really wouldn't change anything. What would you tell him, anyhow?"

A pause. Then, "I see what you mean. The thought has also occurred to me that he might not be as moderate as I have believed . . . If that is the case, then—"

"Yeah," I said. "Want to go back?"

"I can't."

"Okay then, blue boy, you're going to have to trust *me*. You can start by telling me more about this survey—"

"No! I do not know how much you know and how much you do not know. It is obvious that you are trying to elicit more information, so I do not think you know very much. What I am doing is still confidential."

"I am trying to protect you," I said, "therefore, I want as much information as I can get."

"Then protect my body and let me worry about my motives and my thoughts. My mind will be closed to you in the future, so you needn't waste your time trying to probe it."

I handed him an automatic.

"I suggest you carry a weapon for the duration of the tour—to protect your motives."

"Very well."

And, "Go get ready," said I, "we'll be leaving soon."

As I walked back toward the camp, via another route, I analyzed my own motives. A book, alone, could not make or break the Earth, the Radpol, Returnism. Even Phil's *Call of Earth* had not done that, not really. But this thing of Myshtigo's was to be more than just a book. A survey?—What could it be? A push in what direction? I did not know and I had to know. For Myshtigo could not be permitted to live if it would destroy us—and yet, I could not per-

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mit his destruction if the thing might be of any help at all. And it might.

Therefore, someone had to call time out until we could be sure.

The leash had been tugged. I followed.

"Diane," said I, as we stood in the shade of her Skimmer, "you say that I mean something to you, as me, as Karaghiosis."

"That would seem to follow."

"Then hear me. I believe that you *may* be wrong about the Vegan. I am not sure, but if you are wrong it would be a very big mistake to kill him. For this reason, I cannot permit it. Hold off on anything you've planned until we reach Athens. Then request a clarification of that message from the Radpol."

She stared me in both eyes, then said, "All right."

"Then what of Hasan?"

"He waits."

"He makes his own choice as to time and place, does he not? He awaits only the opportunity to strike."

"Yes."

"Then he must be told to hold off until we know for sure."

"Very well."

"You will tell him?"

"He will be told."

"Good enough."

I turned away.

". . . And when the message comes back," she said, "If it should say the same thing as before—what then?"

"We'll see," I said, not turning.

I left her there beside her Skimmer and returned to my own.

When the message did come back, saying what I thought it would say, I knew that I would have more trouble on my hands. This was because I had already made my decision.

Far to the south and east of us, parts of Madagascar still deafened the geigs with radioactive paincries—a tribute to the skill of one of us.

Hasan, I felt certain, could still face any barrier without blinking those sun-drenched, death-accustomed, yellow eyes . . .

He might be hard to stop.

(to be concluded next month)

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For Hank Raymond—who had difficulties gaining the attentions of woman and putting off those of men—life was a totally unsatisfactory affair. As a reader of A. Merritt, Hank thought he had his finger on the one way to place things in their proper perspective. But stepping through mirrors into different worlds can be a tricky business . . .

MIRROR, MIRROR

by Avram Davidson

HANK RAYMOND HAD BEEN A great reader of A. Merritt, and long after that pneumatic prose and antedeluvian rhetoric had ceased to charm him, the effect still lingered. It would not be altogether correct to say that Hank haunted old curiosity shops in hopes of finding one or more mirrors made of a singular and polished green stone like and yet unlike jade and through which he could step into a distant different world peopled principally by a well-stacked princess or priestess with blonde hair and violet eyes, not to mention ill-favored and ill-intentioned busybodies of the male sex, from whose menacing conspiracies Hank would save her, after which they would hold court together in an old stone palace on the shores of the Sea of Brazen Stones (as it might be called)—not altogether correct.

But almost so.

It was Hank's fortune or misfortune that while women appealed to him, he did not much appeal to women. The question, "Has anyone ever told you that you are a very good-looking young man?" lost all of its savor when it was asked only by another very good-looking young man—or, as often or even more often, by a not very good-looking middle-aged man. In this connection we might make mention of Mr. Gavin Greenshaw, his immediate superior in the design department of the textile firm by whom he was employed. How to avoid both this gentleman's ill will and his frequent invitations to Cherry Grove were problems which much exercised Hank Raymond, though not as much as his search of and for old curiosity shops.

The old curiosity shops whence

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he half-hopefully sought his mirror were usually not so damned old, anyway, and mostly most unsatisfactory in the way of curiosities, having a tendency to shade off on the one hand into gifte shoppes presided over by gentle-ladies of a certain age who kept their hats on, and on the other into interior decorator suppliers' establishments often bearing the sign TO THE TRADE ONLY—a phrase capable of more than one meaning, as Hank off and on found out. There was a third hand, though often called second, and these shops were sometimes old enough and more than dirty enough, but his desire for dusty framed oleographs of President Benjamin Harrison and Cabinet was small, and even less for sets of unmatched chipped gravy-boats and well-inhabited badly-sprung sofas smelling strongly of many years in unventilated railroad flats.

Needless to say that he never found anything of an A. Merritt nature in his visitations, and so, not infrequently, fatigued and dispirited, he used to drop into a bar decorated in white and black and pink and buy some woman a drink or two or three and then have an adventure of a sordid type. But not very frequently, either, his salary being but barely adequate to his needs, and his tiny private income just large enough to attract the ravenous attentions of the revenue service.

One night, after a hard day at the office, followed by a fruitless evening casing old curiosity shops, and having failed to meet the requirements of a lady named Doris (or, perhaps, Gladys) whose rent was due and whose kindness short, Hank Raymond was further unfortunate enough to be seen on his way home by his superior, Mr. Gavin Greenshaw, as the latter emerged from a notorious bar and grill. Worse yet, the latter was not alone, being accompanied by a sullenly gregarious weight lifter and photographer's model known as the Butcher Boy. They hailed him, and although he feigned not to have heard or seen them, and hastened his steps, it was with a hopeless feeling and a sinking heart, for he believed that his address was known to Mr. Greenshaw at least, and he distrusted this man's intentions as much as he feared his attentions.

His dismay was all to well justified, for scarcely had he entered his one-room apartment when he heard simultaneously their voices in the foyer and the ring of the doorbell. Hank stood staring at his face in the dull bureau mirror, too discouraged even to pull down the window shade. The neon lights were reflected in the glass as they flashed on and off in the street—yellow *on*, yellow *off*, red *on*, red *off*, blue *on*, blue *off*, yellow *on* . . .

The bell rang again . . .

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And then a most curious thing happened. The yellow remained on, the red never came on, then the blue did. Blue and yellow mingled in the mirror, which turned an unearthly shade of green as it seemed to whirl before his eyes.

And a woman came through it.

Awkwardly, feet first, backward, wiggling, wriggling, rump before wrists: a woman. She turned and looked at Hank Raymond over her shoulder, then dropped to the floor. She was not quite the girl of his dreams. For one thing, she had violet hair; for another, she had blonde eyes.

The bell rang again, and again, quite impatiently; and the note of unnatural gaiety in Mr. Greenshaw's voice commenced to turn a bit peevish, while the disgruntled drone of the Butcher Boy grew loud and angry.

She cried, "How close are they? Are they quite close?"

"Er—"

"You are being held captive, aren't you? You are being pursued?"

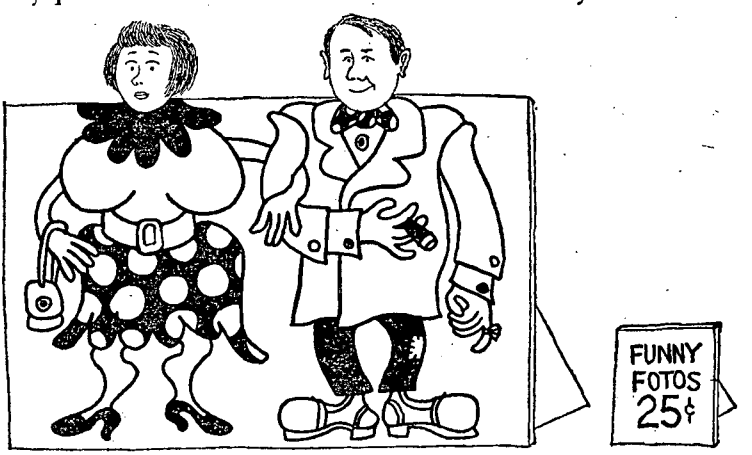
Young Mr. Raymond nodded, though in a somewhat dumbfoundered fashion. The woman smacked her hand upon her thigh. "I knew it!" she exclaimed. "Just like a Gnorf. Thrackel story!"

"Er—Gnorf Thrackel'?"

"No, no. Gnorf. Thrackel. The letter *gnorf. Askel, blubba, ceska, drordel, enkel, gnorf.* Short for—what was his first name? Gnorfluskans, I think. Anyway, I used to love to read all of his stories and even after I stopped I used to think, wouldn't it be wonderful if I could find a quicksilver painting with a glass back and step through it into another world?"

"Hey—!"

"One with only one sun and one moon—and rescue a handsome young priest or prince with brown hair and eyes. Oh!"



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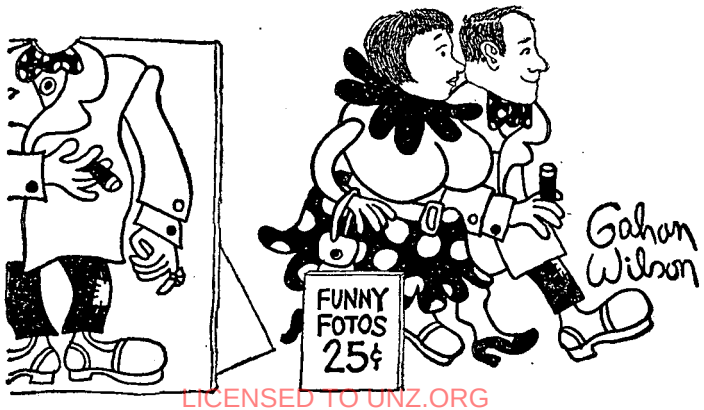
"Well, I'm not a—"

But even while his mouth was about to deny either royal or hierarchial affiliation, the bell rang and the voices called and she seized his wrist with a grip like iron. "Come!" she said. "There is no time to lose. We must hasten!" She half-hoisted, half-flung him to the top of the bureau, where, in the mirror, the neon yellow and blue still whirled in a mad green flux. Then she shoved him through and clambered after him.

Hank, in one last half-look over his shoulder, saw the door to his apartment yield its defective latch, saw it open upon the officious Greenshaw and the brute-like Butcher Boy, observed their shocked and unbelieving faces—and then there was nothing behind him but the back of a shabby old mirror, which shattered to dust.

And over his head seven moons circled a sky dimly lit by one setting and one rising sun . . .

The name of his rescuer is Sarna Sarnis; she holds the rank of a Third Warrior in the Matriarchy. She and Hank Raymond were at first exquisitely happy there, in the old stone palace by the Shore of the Sea of Brazen Stones. But, alas, not being exempt from the common course of human events, his youth and his beauty have alike long fled with the advent of six or seven children, in whose care he is incessantly occupied while Sarna Sarnis gads off to foreign wars. It is rare for him to have so much as a single free hour, but when he has he hastens at once to the nearest city, whose old curiosity shops he haunts in the hopes of finding another quicksilver painting with a glass back.



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The realism of science fiction is its intense concern with and criticism of 20th Century man and his social and political institutions. If SF takes sides and offers answers with a bit more vigor and confidence than would please some, be thankful that it usually does so in the framework of an equally vigorous Story—a story with involvement and action and plot—qualities which seem alien to much mainstream fiction. F&SF's primary concern in these pages is the publication of good stories, not discussion of the ideas therein. However, the following article should interest our readers if only as an indication of how far the provocative arm of SF can reach. It is a critique of American science fiction by two Soviet writers. It appeared in Kommunist, *the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. We are grateful to Theodore Guerchon for bringing it to our attention; as we are to Isaac Asimov, Poul Anderson, Mack Reynolds, and Ray Bradbury for their reactions—which immediately follow the article.*

THE FUTURE, ITS PROMOTERS AND FALSE PROPHETS

by E. Brandis and V. Dmitrevskiy

(*translated by Theodore Guerchon*)

In the West, and in the USA in particular, science fiction serves as one of the means of ideological indoctrination of the broad masses of the people. Currently several specialized magazines (science fiction) enjoy mass circulation in the United States (*Galaxy, Amazing Stories, Fantastic Universe, Astounding Science Fiction*—recently renamed *Analog, Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and others).

The most striking feature of the social prophecies of the American and English fantasy writers is that they are not based on any concept of the progressive development of society, but involve regression, decline, degeneracy, backwardness and the destruction of mankind. Modern Western science fiction writes of an anti-Utopia, and it is

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significant that bourgeois critics and writers themselves use this term in speaking of social science fiction.

In the story "Progress" (1962), Poul Anderson describes life on earth several centuries after an atomic war which, by a fluke, has spared the aborigines of New Zealand—the Maoris. They, and possibly the author too, feel that man can achieve his welfare and happiness by making use of sail boats, windmills and electric stations inherited from the past. These dark prophecies are perfectly consistent with the pessimistic views of many bourgeois scientists and writers who do not believe that the nations can forestall universal suicide. Following in the footsteps of the philosophers and sociologists, the bourgeois writers preach relativism, the helplessness of the mind against the mysterious and unknowable universe, and the illusory nature of social progress. They regard history as a never-ending cycle: what has been will be again.

The characteristic aspect of contemporary science fiction by Anglo-American bourgeois writers is the projection into the future of present state relations, social problems, and events and conflicts inherent in modern capitalism. These writers transfer imperialist contradictions to imaginary space worlds, supposing that they will be dominated by the old master-servant relations, by colonialism and by the wolfish laws of plunder and profit.

The results of a technocratic regime are made plain in the novel "Speakeasy" by Mack Reynolds, which was published in the January 1963 issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. The story is set in America, in the Twenty-first Century. Capitalist society has been put on a functional basis . . . when a group of otherwise inclined people attempt to bring about reforms to rescue the state from stagnation, the deputy chief of police . . . esablishes a "strong personality" dictatorship.

Our readers are familiar with modern Western science fiction from the collection of American stories published by the Foreign Literature Publishing House and individual stories which have appeared from time to time in Soviet periodicals. Judging solely from these translations, one might get the erroneous impression that bourgeois science fiction writing is now for the most part nonpolitical and quite harmless . . .

Ray Bradbury, the talented American writer, is the most popular (foreign science fiction writer) in our country. He carries the dark aspects of the contemporary capitalist world to the point of grotesque satire. The humanistic trend in Bradbury's work is plain. But he believes that the main evil lies not in the social structure of bourgeois society, but in the stormy develop-

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ment of science and technology, which is crushing the individual.

The well-known biochemist Isaac Asimov, who is also one of the most serious of the American science fiction writers, has written a preface to a collection of Soviet science fiction stories published in New York in 1962.

He noted the important fact that Soviet writers take as a basic premise the fact that "if this (the communist society) goes on, man's goodness and nobility will be free to develop and people will live under the reign of love. I suppose," writes Asimov, "if one were sufficiently skeptical, one might suppose these stories were written strictly for American consumption and are published only in order to confuse us and weaken our will; that the Soviet citizen is not allowed to see them, but is fed on pure hate."

It is true that after this monstrous assertion Asimov says: "I do not believe this, however. A more reasonable supposition is that the stories are indeed among those written for Soviet consumption but are carefully selected and are, therefore, not representative. To check on that, one would have to obtain Soviet science fiction magazines or the equivalent and see what the general run of unselected material is like."

. . . We can assure Mr. Asimov that the humanism he has found in the several stories "very carefully selected" is inherent in and typical of Soviet science fiction and Soviet literature as a whole. Asimov's ideas only show that even the honest American intellectuals are so blinded by the unofficial anticommunist propaganda that they often cannot tell black from white.

ISAAC ASIMOV replies

I THINK MESSRS. BRANDIS AND Dmitrevskiy are being a little harsh with me. They themselves, in referring to American science fiction stories published in the Soviet Union say: "Judging solely from these translations, one might get the erroneous impression that bourgeois science fiction writing is now for the most part nonpolitical and quite harmless . . ."

In other words, they say that what the Soviets see of American science fiction is not representative of the whole and is deliberately selected to be "nonpolitical and quite harmless." They ought, then, to hold me fairly blameless if the same thought had occurred

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to me about Soviet science fiction published in the United States.

Brandis and Dmitrevskiy had the opportunity, apparently, to read other American science fiction and satisfy themselves that the translated material was really unrepresentative.

When I wrote my prefaces to the eleven stories in SOVIET SCIENCE FICTION and MORE SOVIET SCIENCE FICTION, I was less fortunate for I had no access to Soviet science fiction generally. But I took that into account and carefully mentioned this lack of representivity only as a "supposition."

I wish they had continued to quote the final lines of my introduction; lines that followed immediately after the passage they did quote. Those last lines read:

"On the whole, though, what I would like to believe is that the Soviet citizen would really like to see the coming of a reign of love when 'nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'

"Why, after all, should he not?

"If only we could believe it is what they really want, and if only they could believe it is what we really want, then perhaps things would yet end well."—ISAAC ASIMOV

POUL ANDERSON replies

COMMUNISM EMBODIES A NOBLE idea: that man and man's lot are improvable and it is the duty of every individual to help in making that improvement. Whether or not the idea is true, or even meaningful, makes little difference here. The fact remains that through a long span of history, some people have acted on it.

Unfortunately, Communism—more accurately, Marxism-Leninism—makes human improvability a dogma rather than a theory, hypothesis, or pious wish. Then Communism adds the further dogma that there is one and only one correct way to achieve improvement, and it has already been discovered. From this, the conclusion follows logically that men who know that way are duty bound to make their fellow men carry out the indicated measures. Of course, one prefers to persuade them, by reason and example;

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but if this fails, then coercion is not only permissible but imperative.

The effect of the dogmas on philosophy and literature is to make optimism compulsory. Or to put the matter differently: while the Communist admits that death and suffering occur, and that even in a Socialist country there can be grave injustices done, he nevertheless lacks all sense of tragedy.

Furthermore, because of the dogmatism imposed on it, his ideal is in inherent conflict with the (at least equally) noble ideal of freedom. He talks of freedom, yes, but to him the reins of compulsion cannot be dropped until the individual is so thoroughly conditioned as to be unable to defy the Communist schema. It does not occur to him, in the fullest sense, that the individual may be entitled to freedom *now*, a freedom limited only by the restraints necessary to keep society functioning, restraints which are physical but do not invade the ultimate privacy of the mind.

I am oversimplifying, I know. Americans are not really that free, have never been and probably never will be. Nor are people behind the Iron Curtain that much enslaved. What I am trying to get across is merely the contrast between the orientations, the final values and goals, of the two societies. Since literature is necessarily an oversimplification of life, the conflict is easier to see there than in the muddled and ever-changing realm of actual politics.

For instance, it would be treason to the Communist cause to suggest that man is an ignoble, doomed ape, that what we call "good" is rare and unnatural to him while what we call "evil" is his norm. But in the West, such an idea can be entertained. I don't say it is a true idea—I don't believe it is, myself—but I do say that to advance it for consideration does not hurt a free society any more than the advancement of any other idea does.

Likewise, I don't believe a total nuclear war is inevitable, and hope as sincerely as Messrs. Brandis and Dmitrevskiy that no such thing ever comes to pass. Still, I feel free to deal in fiction with this as a possibility, and with the possible consequences. "Progress" was actually an optimistic story. It suggested that man can survive almost anything, even a nuclear war, and rebuild and

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know happiness again. It also suggested that perhaps our present machine culture is not the optimum one for the human animal. I don't know if this is really so or not; but I don't believe anyone does, either.

It seems to me profoundly unscientific to maintain that history has had one certain character and will in the future take one certain course. True, Marx and Lenin (as well as Stalin and Mao!) have made some very interesting observations about history. But to insist that these were the most basic observations that will ever be made is to go far beyond the data we possess.

Science fiction in the West operates in the area of what man does not yet know and has not yet experienced. In the nature of the case, these things are unknowable before they come to pass. Therefore our science fiction, unconfined by dogma, treats of many conceivable situations, some pleasant, some unpleasant. It has no more ideological significance than that.

In conclusion, I have known and argued with a number of Communists. When the arguments were conducted in a civilized manner, as a mutual search for understanding rather than a contest in abuse, we always arrived at some insights. Thus, for example, I have seen that one of our root differences is that they have somewhat more faith in human rationality than I do. Someday, perhaps, scientific psychology will prove which attitude is more nearly right. Meanwhile, they are entitled to their belief: So am I entitled to mine. Totalitarianism consists in denying anyone, anyone at all, the right to his private beliefs and his private exploration of reality.—POUL ANDERSON

MACK REYNOLDS replies

ACTUALLY, I FIND A CERTAIN amount of validity in this brief article on Western science fiction. Perhaps there would have been more had the authors been able to dig further into their subject.

Certain it is that when sf writers extrapolate in the field of political economy they are more apt to wind up with an anti-Utopia, rather than an upbeat society of the future. For every

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Bellamy's *Looking Backward* there are several Orwell's *1984*. And possibly one of the reasons for this is that a majority of our writers are convinced that our present social institutions are so superior that any change must be of a negative nature.

Personally, I don't agree. I am of the opinion that the socio-economic institutions of the world—including those of the Soviet Union—are in a condition of flux. I am optimistic enough to believe that we have a good chance of making this a pretty damn fine world, by the standards of the past, but I am also not so blind as not to realize that if the present policies of the great powers are continued we more likely will see world chaos in our time.

My opinions are borne out in my stories and had E. Brandis and V. Dmitrevskiy looked further into the matter they would have so discovered.

For instance, in Judy Merril's popular annual Best Science Fiction anthology, 7th issue, is reprinted "Freedom," an up-beat story of the near future in which the protagonist is a Russian colonel and the whole story laid in Moscow and Prague. In the same issue, she gives honorable mention to "Black Man's Burden" an up-beat story laid in North Africa and dealing with the problems of Negroes.

If our Russian friends were consistent readers of this magazine they might have read "Russkies Go Home!" a couple of years ago, in which Soviet citizens, grown prosperous even beyond present dreams, become the great tourists of the future. The story is humorous but only a fanatic could claim it either anti-Russian or anti-Utopian.

My novelettes "Revolution" and "Combat," which appeared within the past few years in what was then *Astounding Science Fiction,* both deal with the future of the Cold War, both are laid in the Soviet Union and both are up-beat in their dealing with the future. I would say that the average informed Soviet citizen would not find them objectionable—I am not speaking of party hacks.

A science fiction writer specializing in extrapolating in socio-economics has as wide a field as writers in more exact sciences—at least. In my time I have published stories that involved the world of the future being based upon anarchism, technocracy, so-

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cialism, communism (Soviet Union variety), communism (Yugoslavian variety), syndicalism, industrial feudalism, state capitalism, and various combinations of these. Sometimes they are up-beat, sometimes not. It's according to the story and its needs. Nor is my background material based solely on Western propaganda. I have travelled in more than sixty countries, including seven communist ones, and have been a life-long student of political economy.

One thing I have found. Conformists in any society have a difficult time projecting themselves into a future in which the institutions they favor have been changed. A *desirable* future in which these institutions have been found outmoded is practically impossible for them to handle.

So I offer this challenge to Messrs. Brandis and Dmitrevskiy.

Admitting that many American and British science fiction writers find it difficult to produce an up-beat story of the future in which capitalism is no longer the prevailing social system but has been superseded by something more in keeping with developments of tomorrow, show us then a story by a Soviet Union science fiction writer that projects *beyond* what you call communism.

Or do you contend that you have come to the end of the road of social evolution? That there is nothing beyond that could possibly be superior to the present system of the Soviet Union.

—MACK REYNOLDS

RAY BRADBURY replies

MY ONE REACTION TO THE comments of Brandis and Dmitrevskiy is sadness. I have always felt that it is science-fiction's business to teach us, while entertaining us, about our old foolishness, our present foolishness, and our future foolishness. We spray each other with words and insist on misunderstanding what could be understood if we got in a room together and saw each other's faces and knew our mutual humanity. Any future destruction will be brought about not by one group of poor fools, but by two groups blindly moving in the dark and pulling back from the warm touch of

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recognition. I happen to be one who believes we will not destroy each other but that, fools though we be, we will move closer together. Russia is being perverted by her increased technologies and industrializations, so that she begins to resemble the United States, even as the United States, out of mass demands and needs, moves closer to resembling certain aspects of Russian society. This, like it or not, will go on happening, regardless of what each country pretends to want or be, until one is the mirror image of the other. Those of us who watched, saw it coming many years ago. All of mankind will benefit from it. Russia will be "spoiled" even as America has been spoiled, by her material goods, which will relax her even more, and make the need for war or aggrandizement unnecessary. We will then conjoined, face the problem of making outlaw China an inlaw. Mutually, we will seek to "spoil" China with technological riches. Anything we s-f writers can do to illustrate this immense irony, this comedy of power and willfulness, will be of benefit to readers in both countries. We must get to know each other, it is as simple and needful as that. Where tyranny or constriction exists, each country must look to find it and eliminate it. I sincerely hope that we can read one another's works as honestly as possible and accept them as valid stories done by people sincerely wishing to present a point of view. Fools we all most certainly are, but Fools we do not have to remain.

—RAY BRADBURY

COMING NEXT MONTH

We had hoped to include in this issue a new story by **JOHN CHRISTOPHER** (PLANET IN PERIL, NO BLADE OF GRASS, THE LONG WINTER). For various reasons, this was impossible, but Mr. Christopher will make one of his rare magazine appearances in next month's issue, with A FEW KINDRED SPIRITS. The conclusion to **ROGER ZELAZNY's** . . . AND CALL ME CONRAD will also appear in the November issue. You won't want to miss it.

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So far the only chip in the veneer of our illustrious corps of astronauts is Lieutenant Commander John W. Young's action in sneaking a corned beef sandwich aboard his Gemini spacecraft. This was reported by the press along with NASA director James Webb's testimony before a House Appropriations subcommittee that "this was not an adequate performance by an astronaut." Comdr. Young has not yet been drummed out of the corps, but it is unlikely that he will be making any future flights. Which stern reaction leads us to wonder what would happen if astronaut or astronauts became involved in underhanded dealings of a more serious nature. Or would that *news ever reach us . . .* ?

NO JOKES ON MARS

by James Blish

THE SKIMMER SOARED EASILY through a noon sky as blue-black as freshly spilled washable ink. On Mars, the gravity was so low that almost anything could be made to fly, given power to spare; on Earth, the skimmer would have been about as airworthy as a flat stone.

On Earth, Karen had never felt very airworthy either, but here on Mars she weighed only forty-nine pounds and was soaring nicely. She wished she could keep the Martian weight when she got home, but she knew well enough that the loss was only a loan.

The official strapped in on her right—as the first Earthside reporter in a year and a half she had rated nothing less than the executive officer of Port Ares—had already shown signs of believing that Karen's weight was distributed quite well, no matter what it was. That was pleasant, too.

"This is the true desert we're going over now—the real Mars," he was saying, his voice muffled by his oxygen mask. "That orange-red sand is hematite, a kind of iron ore. Like most rusts, it's got a little water in it, and the Martian lichens can get it out. Also it can blow up a fine sandstorm."

Karen took no notes; she had known that much before she'd left

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Cape Kennedy. Besides, perhaps perversely, she was more interested in Joe Kendricks, the skimmer's civilian pilot. Col. Margolis was all right: young, hard-muscled, highly trained, with that modest but dedicated look cultivated by the Astronaut Corps. Like most of the AC complement here, he also looked as though he had spent most of his hitch at Port Ares under glass. Kendricks, on the other hand, looked weathered.

Joe Kendricks showed not the faintest sign of returning her interest. At the moment, his attention was totally on the skimmer and on the desert. He too was a reporter, representing a broadcasting-wire service pool, but since he had been on Mars since the second landing, he had suffered the usual fate of the local leg man: he had first become familiar, then invisible. Perhaps for this reason, or perhaps from simple staleness, or loneliness, or a combination of these and still other reasons, his copy lately had been showing signs of cynicism about the whole Mars venture.

Maybe that had been inevitable. All the same, when he had taken to slugging his weekly column "JoKe's on Mars," the home office emitted only one dutiful chuckle and sent Karen across forty-eight million miles of expensive space to trouble-shoot. Neither the press nor the AC wanted the taxpayer to think anybody found anything funny about Mars.

Kendricks banked the skimmer sharply and pointed down. "Cat," he said, to nobody in particular.

"Oho." Col. Margolis picked up his binoculars. Karen followed suit. The glasses were difficult to look into through the eyepieces of her oxygen mask, and even more difficult to focus with the heavy gloves; but suddenly the big dune-cat sprang to life in front of her.

It was beautiful. The dune-cat, as all encyclopedias note, is the largest animal on Mars, usually measuring about four feet from nose to base of spine (it has no tail). The eyes, slitted and with an extra membrane against the flying sand, give it a vaguely catlike appearance, as does the calico pelt (orange, marbled with blue-green which is actually a parasitic one-celled plant which helps supply its oxygen); but it is not a cat. Though it has an abdominal pouch like a kangaroo or a 'possum, it is not a marsupial either. Some of the encyclopedias—the cheaper and more sensational ones—suggest that it may be descended from the long-extinct Canal-Masons of Mars, but since the Masons left behind neither pictures nor bones, this is at best only a wild guess.

It loped gracefully over the rusty dunes, heading in nearly a straight line, probably for the

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nearest oasis. Joe Kendricks followed it easily. Evidently it hadn't yet spotted the skimmer, which was nearly noiseless in the Everest-thin air.

"A real break, Miss Chandler," Col. Margolis was saying. "We don't see much action on Mars, but a cat's always good for a show. JoKe, have you got a spare canteen you can throw him?"

The leg man nodded and set his machine to wheeling in a wide arc over the cat, while Karen tried to puzzle out what Col. Margolis could be talking about. Action? The only encyclopedia entry she recalled at all well said that the dune-cat was "quick and strong, but aloof and harmless to man." Nobody, the entry added, knew what it ate.

Joe Kendricks produced a flat can of water, loosened the pull-tab slightly, and to Karen's astonishment—for water was worth more than fine gold on Mars—threw it over the side of the skimmer. It fell with dream-like slowness in the weak gravity, but the weakened pull-tab burst open when it struck, just ahead of the cat.

Instantly, the sands all around the cat were aswarm with creatures. They came running and wriggling toward the rapidly evaporating stain of water from as far as fifteen feet away.

Most of them were too small to make out clearly, even through the binoculars. Karen was just as glad, for the two that she could see clearly were quite bad enough.

They were each about a foot long, and looked like a nightmare combination of centipede and scorpion. And where the other crawlers were all headed mindlessly toward the water-stain, these had sensed that their first target had to be the dune-cat.

The cat fought with silent fury, with great flat blows of one open paw; in the other, something metallic flashed in the weak harsh sunlight. It paid no heed to the creatures' claws, though it sustained several bloody nips from them in the first few seconds; it was their stings it was wary of. Karen was instantly certain that they were venomous.

She was beginning to think the men in the skimmer were, too.

The struggle seemed to last forever, but it was actually only a moment before the cat had neatly amputated one sting, and had smashed the other horror halfway into the sand. From there it was upon the burst canteen with a single bound, and tossing back whatever trickle of liquid gold it might still hold.

Then, without a single upward glance, it was running like a dust-devil for the near horizon. Nothing was left to see below but the smaller critters, some of which were now becoming aware of the two losers of the battle.

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Karen discovered that she was breathing again—and that she had forgotten to take pictures. Col. Margolis pounded Joe Kendricks excitedly on one shoulder.

"After him!" the AC officer crowed. "Let's not drop the ball now, JoKe. Give her the gun!"

Even beneath the oxygen mask there was something cold and withdrawn about the set of Kendricks' expression, but the skimmer nevertheless leapt obediently after the vanished dune-cat. The cat was fast, but the chase was no contest.

"Set me down about a mile ahead of him," the colonel said. He loosened his pistol in its holster.

"Colonel," Karen said. "Are you —are you going to kill the cat? Even after the fight it put up?"

"No indeed," Col. Margolis said heartily. "Just collect our little fee for the water we gave it. Over behind that dune looks about right, JoKe."

"It isn't legal," Kendricks said unexpectedly. "You know that."

"The law's an anachronism," the colonel said in an even voice. "Hasn't been enforced for years."

"You should know," Kendricks said. "You enforce 'em. All right, hop out. I'll cover you."

The AC officer jumped from the hovering skimmer to the rusty sand, and Kendricks took the machine aloft again, circling him.

The cat stopped when it topped the rise and saw the man, but after a glance aloft at the skimmer, it did not try to run away. The colonel had his gun out now, but he was not pointing it anywhere.

"I should very much like to know," Karen said in her quietest and most dangerous voice, "just exactly what is going on here."

"A little quiet poaching," Kendricks said, his eyes on the ground. "The cat carries a thing in his pouch. Our hero down there is going to rob him of it."

"But—what is it? Is it valuable?"

"Valuable to the cat, but valuable enough to the colonel. Ever seen a Martian pomander?"

Karen had indeed seen several; they had been the ultimate in gifts from swains for several years. It was a fuzzy sphere about the size of a grape, which, when suspended and warmed between the breasts, surrounded the wearer with a sweet and literally unearthly musk. Karen had tried one only once, for the perfume, though light, also had a faint narcotic quality which encouraged a lady to say "Maybe" when what she had meant was "No."

"The pomander—it's part of the cat? Or a charm or treasure or something like that?"

"Well, that's hard to say. The experts call it his hibernation organ—he won't get through next winter without it. It isn't attached to him in any way, but the cats

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always act as though they can't come by another one—or grow another, whichever it is."

Karen clenched her fists. "Joe—put me down."

He darted a quick sidewise glance at her. "I wouldn't advise it. There's nothing you can do—and I know. I've tried."

"Joe Kendricks, I don't know what else you'd call what's going on down there, but there's one thing you know it is, as well as I do. It's a story—and I want it."

"You'll never get it off the planet," he said. "But—all right, all, right. Down we go."

As they trudged closer, the cat, erect, seemed to be holding out something toward the colonel, who had his back to them. Because it was closer to the crest of the dune than the man, the cat did not seem to be any shorter. After a moment, Col. Margolis threw back his head and laughed. At this distance the air failed to carry the sound.

"Not the pomander," Joe Kendricks muttered without waiting for Karen's question. "It's trying to buy its life with a shard. They always do."

"What's—?"

'A stone with Canal-Mason inscriptions on it."

"But Joe! Surely *that's* valuable?"

"Not worth a dime; the planet's littered with them. The Masons wrote all over every brick they laid. The cat could have picked that one up right where he's standing. Nobody's ever been able to read a line of the stuff, anyhow. No connection to Earthly languages."

The cat saw them now; it turned slightly and held out its fragment of stone toward Joe Kendricks. Col. Margolis looked at them over his shoulder with a start of annoyance.

"No good, cat," he said harshly. "It's *me* you're dickering with. And I don't want your rock. Empty the pouch."

He could not possibly have expected the dune-cat to understand his words—but the situation, and a brusque eviscerating gesture of both his hands, obviously had already conveyed more than enough.

Another slight movement, and slanted eyes like twin sapphires blazed into Karen's own out of the tigerish mask. In a gnarled voice that carried human speech only with pain, the dune-cat said:

"Missessss Earsssman, buy?"

It held out the worthless bit of brick it offered for its life. Its stare was proud, and its outthrust paw absolutely steady.

"I'll be glad to buy," Karen said, and reached out. "And, Col. Margolis—the Lord and the Astronaut Corps help you if you break my bargain."

Gloved hand touched orange paw. The Martian looked at her a

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moment longer, and then was gone.

Col. Margolis remained silent during the whole of the trip back to Port Ares, but once there, he lost no time in having them both on the carpet—in, of course, his own office. He was obviously also in a pet; in part, Karen was almost sure, for having made up to her in the first place. *Well, that's the way the world wags, Colonel; actions have consequences . . . even on Mars.*

"It won't be possible for me to behave as if this hadn't happened," he said, in a voice intended to convey good will. "The cats are smart enough to spread the word, and it'll take months to pound home to them that your behavior doesn't mean anything. But if I can have your promise not to say anything further about it, at least I won't be forced to have you shipped home by the next rocket."

"Five months from now," Joe Kendricks added helpfully.

"It had better mean something, and it'd better be just the beginning," Karen said. "Do you think women would go on using these pomanders if they knew what they were—and what they cost? This story's going to be told."

There was a brief silence. Then Kendricks said: "One story doesn't make a scandal."

"Not even with the base commander in the middle of it?"

But the colonel only smiled gently. "I don't mind being a villain, if the colony needs one," he said. "You can hang me by my thumbs if you like. I'd be interested to see how many people back home take your word against mine, though."

"I've never pilloried anybody in my life, and my editors know it," Karen said. "But that's a long way from the point. It isn't just one story. It's the pomander trade as a whole that's the scandal."

The colonel abruptly turned his back and looked out of the window at the domed colony—a spectacle of struggle against a terrible world, a vast planetary desert about which Karen knew she knew very little. He said: "All right, I tried. Now it's your turn, JoKe. Set her straight."

"Don't call me that," Kendricks growled. Then: "But Miss Chandler, the Corps isn't going to let you stop the pomander trade—don't you know that? It's supposed to be immune even from petty graft. And this is far from petty. If the law's been broken—and God knows it has—half the men in Port Ares have a slice of the profits. It can't be stopped now."

"All the worse," Karen said. "But we can stop it. Joe, you can help me. They can't ship both of us home."

"Don't you think I've tried to get this story off Mars before?" Kendricks said angrily. "The

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Corps 'reviews' every line that leaves the planet. After this incident, the colonel here will read my copy himself—"

"You bet," Col. Margolis said, with a certain relish.

"—and I've got to live with this crew, the year around." After a moment, Kendricks added, "Six hundred and sixty-eight days a year."

"That's just why they can't kill the story in the long run," Karen said eagerly. "If they're censoring you, you can slip the word to me somehow, sooner or later. I know how to read between the lines—and you know how to write between them. The censor doesn't exist who's awake every second!"

"They can kill me," Joe Kendricks said stolidly. "Both of us, if they have to. The next ship home is five months away, and people get killed on Mars all the time."

Karen let fly an unladylike snort. "JoKe, you're scared. Do you think a Corps commandant would kill the only two reporters on Mars? How would *that* look in his record, no matter how careful he was?"

Col. Margolis turned back to glare at them. But when he spoke, his voice was remarkably neutral.

"Look, let's be reasonable," he said. "Why so much fuss over one small irregularity, when there's so much being accomplished on Mars that's positive, that's downright great? This is one of humanity's greatest outposts. Why soil it for the sake of a sensation? Why not just live and let live?"

"Because that's just what you're not doing," Karen said. "You told me that you weren't going to kill the cat this afternoon, but you didn't tell me it would die later, in the winter, when you were through stealing from it. It's the Spaniards and the Incas all over again! Are we spending billions to reach the planets, just to export the same old crimes against the natives?"

"Now, calm down a minute, please, Miss Chandler. The cats are only animals. You're exaggerating a good deal, you know."

"I don't think she is," Joe Kendricks said in a low voice. "The dune-cats are intelligent. Killing them off is criminal—I've always thought so, and so does the law. Karen, I'll try to get the dope out to you, but the Corps has the manpower here to stop me if it really tries. I may have to bring the rest of the story back to Earth with me, instead—a matter of years. Can you wait that long?"

They looked at each other for a long moment. His expression was much changed.

Karen said: "You bet I'll wait."

He drew a deep breath. "You're sure you mean that."

"Dead sure, Joe," Karen said. "The jokes are over." ◄

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It was an enormous park of a world, a place of green forest and sprawling meadows and sparkling blue lakes. The fiery rocket thrust of the Terran ship was perhaps the first scar inflicted upon Vega IV. It was a planet seemingly unfamiliar with death . . . as we know it.

THE GLORIOUS FOURTH

by Jack Sharkey

THEY ORBITED FIVE TIMES BEfore landing, crisscrossing the blue-green orb in non-repetitive circles, high above the faint silver haze where the atmosphere began. It was a beautiful planet, far exceeding the expectations of any of the three-man crew. The taped reports from the exploratory rockets—automatic in function, steel-hearted, hungry only for cold physichemical fact—had not done the newfound world justice.

An oceanless planet, with an eccentric rotation that let every portion of its surface slide through the should-have-been equatorial belt once in every two light-to-dark cycles, its surface was uniformly warm and suitable for living. At an unvarying 75-82 degrees Fahrenheit, it was an enormous park of a world, a place of green forest and sprawling meadows and sparkling blue lakes. It made the selection of a landing-site painfully difficult. No matter where they chose to set the ship, the searing fires would mar that pristine surface with an ugly blot of crisp, smoking char.

In deference to the undisturbed beauty of the planet, Captain Alan Bochner turned on the CO_2-nozzles a full minute before touchdown. Designed to smother any fires ignited by the ferocious rocket-thrust, the nozzles were generally not used until the ship was resting solidly upon its tailfins; then only did the thirty-foot plumes of frigid white flakes spurt outward in a rimey ring about the ship. Bochner knew his gesture was meaningless, for all practical purposes. A dose of the incredibly cold carbon-dioxide snow would do the grasses and foliage no more good than exposure to the tailfires themselves. But the frost would at least allow the dead plants to remain green.

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Settling ponderously through a boiling cloud of steam as the very ground beneath the ship was desiccated of its last drop of moisture in that hellish heat, the towering vessel came to rest. As Bochner flipped the cutoff switch, the silence was shattering. Outside the smoke-tarnished hull, trickles and threads of vapor wound slowly upward, and were dissipated in minutes by a gentle updraft of the overheated air surrounding the ship. Bochner ran his practiced fingers over the control-panel, stopping the gyros, the radar-altimeter, the air- and water-reclamation machinery. For a time, now, there would be moist, clean planetary air to breathe, water to drink; the three men aboard the ship anticipated with relish their respite from the stale, tasteless, antiseptic products of the ship. Bochner re-checked the panel once more, then unstrapped himself from the padded contour-cradle.

From similar resting-places, his lieutenants, Ed Harker and Bill McKenna, were rising, stretching their thrust-sore muscles and gratefully removing their cumbersome spacesuits. Boots, shorts and blouses would be the lightweight uniform of their sojourn upon Vega IV. Discovered on Independence Day, three years earlier, it had been nicknamed "The Glorious Fourth" by the men examining the three-dimensional color photos which the exploratory robot-rockets had brought back to Earth. A planet of such enviable climate was a godsend to a rapidly overpopulating Terran Empire, already uncomfortably packed in the confines of its home planet, neighboring Mars, and the largest of Jupiter's moons. But there were tests to be made, things to discover which the best of the sensitive instruments aboard the automatic rockets could not ascertain. To make absolutely certain the planet was habitable by Man, Man had to land there and see for himself.

"It should be cool enough to go out, now," said Bochner, at the door of the airlock. "I gave it a little extra CO_2 as we came down."

McKenna, consulting a gauge beside the massive portal, said, "Air-pressure's only fractionally higher than Earth-normal. We won't need the lock."

Harker, the junior member of the crew—while a Lieutenant like McKenna, he lacked the other man's seniority—nodded, and twirled the unsealing wheel. The three men stepped inside the lock-chamber, and Harker opened the outer door. For a moment, the three just stood where they were and breathed. Air, air like the first breeze of the first warm spring day, flooded their nostrils and lungs. Bochner chuckled ruefully. "We haven't even set foot on the ground, and already I know I'm going to hate to leave when our two months are up."

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They descended the metal ladder to the ground. Beneath the ship, the grass had simply vanished. Cracked black soil showed but the first scar Man would vent upon Vega IV if the tests of this three-man crew gave a waiting empire the colonial go-ahead. A door low upon the vertical hull, which Harker now unbolted, gave them access to their equipment. Storing it there was simpler than having to lug it down the ladder from the gaping port thirty yards overground. From the cubicle thus exposed, they removed—with brisk teamwork, not a motion wasted—the portable shelters, medical supplies, canisters of seeds, bulbs and cuttings (to sow familiar Earth-crops which the primal wave of colonists could then reap), various devices for testing plant and animal life, and weapons. These last were hand-guns in which Terran technology had modified the common laser-beam into a deadly, piercing sword of raw power. With one such weapon, a lone man could puncture, slash and even decapitate an oncoming horde of enemy troops in seconds.

"I hate these damned things," said Harker, strapping the holster to his belt. "I'm always afraid I'm going to trip and accidentally depress the firing-stud. I don't much enjoy the prospect of ramming a quarter-inch hole through my foot —or drilling an instant oil-well."

"There's a safety-lock," Bochner said laconically, staring around them at the distant dappled rim of the forest which ringed their broad green landing-site. "Use it."

Harker sighed and secured the final buckle.

"You know—" said McKenna, peering across the meadow in a hopeful squint, then assisting his vision with binoculars, "—I think that's an *orchard* over there, sir!"

"No kidding?!" remarked Bochner, using his own binoculars to view the far-off copse. "Damned if I don't think you're right, Bill. But what kind of fruit is that?"

"Where?" asked Ed Harker, sweeping the horizon with his own glasses, then suddenly focusing on the heavy-laden boughs. "Hey, yeah! Why don't we take a walk over there and see?"

"There's work to be done, first," said Bochner. "Let's get the shelters up before dark. The tapes indicated an almost nightly rainfall. Once we're sure the equipment is going to stay dry, we can take a hike across this meadow to look. Not before. And," he turned his serene blue eyes upon Harker, "when we *do* get there, no one eats anything that hasn't been tested first." His gaze appended, *"and that means* you, *Mister!"*

Bridling beneath the other man's implication of foolhardy insubordination, Harker managed a taut smile, and just said, "Naturally, sir," then turned and proceeded to his work.

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The roaring cacophony of the landing had frightened off the regional fauna, of course, but within an hour of touchdown, they saw their first birds, brightly colored, long-winged birds that glided and circled in the manner of gulls above the meadow. Then, at twilight, as they were settling down to a supper of food-concentrates, there was a rustling in the long grass, and a small furry creature—somewhere between a bear-cub and a lynx in appearance—came snuffling along toward them, showing no fear, nor menace, only timid curiosity. It had golden fur and large yellow-brown eyes. It drew near Harker's chair and—the first moment any of the men had noticed its presence—sat up on its haunches and gave a friendly yip.

Harker almost jumped out of his boots. Then seeing the small creature which had so startled him, he laughed, and tossed a chunk of his food-concentrate to it. "Hi there, fella," he said. The creature snorted, champed at the small mouthful of nourishment with its head back, then swallowed it and immediately began to nuzzle Harker's thigh, obviously interested in more.

Harker laughed again, and turned to his plate to break off another piece. He heard the short crackling hum with disbelieving ears, and spun back. The creature lay sprawled upon the grass. When Harker looked up, Bochner was just reholstering his laser.

"An excellent specimen," said the Captain, bending and hefting the limp body by its hind legs. "I'll see what the analyzer makes of it." Without another word, he proceeded with the small, silent body to the silvery device that stood just within the flap of the nearer shelter, and popped it into the opening at its forefront. The analyzer would disintegrate the animal, layer by layer, checking out its metabolic processes, listing its protein structures, chemical components, probable lifespan and ecological relationship to its environment. He closed the door of the device, sealed it, and turned it on.

Back at the table, Harker had neither moved nor spoken. He just stared at the sweat-stained back of Captain Alan Bochner's blouse, the bit of food-concentrate still held between his fingers. McKenna reached over and wordlessly took hold of Harker's forearm, giving it a sympathetic squeeze which was also a warning. Harker turned blank eyes to his fellow-lieutenant, his mouth partially open, then he blinked and shook his head, bringing the world back into focus. He suddenly spun his head about to look at the oblivious Bochner once more, and his throat-muscles worked.

". . . *Don't* . . . !" Bill Mckenna said in a fierce whisper.

Harker stared at him. "But—"

"Don't!" Bill repeated softly. "I know, Ed, I know how you feel,

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But just don't. Bochner won't stand for it. I've flown with him a lot longer than you have."

"But— Two *months,* Bill!" sighed Harker. "We're going to be here for *two months!* Did he *have* to start tonight? Like *that?* Right while that thing was—"

"Forget it!" grated McKenna, keeping his voice low. "You'll be all right in a minute. Take a deep breath. Drink some water." He let his fingers slip away from Harker's forearm as Bochner returned to the table. When the Captain sat down again, the two men, eyes lowered, were concentrating on their meal.

Bochner took a bite or two, then straightened up. "Did you notice the grass?" he said, tilting his head toward the ship, a tapering shadow against the star-filled night sky.

"The grass?" Harker echoed blankly. McKenna looked from their superior to the ship and back, with equal incomprehension.

"It's re-growing already," Bochner remarked. "Two hours ago, I would have sworn nothing would grow there again for the next few years. But the ground right under the firing-tubes is turning fuzzy already. Damnedest thing. But good for the crops, if the planetary soil will take kindly to them when we plant."

"That *is* strange," said McKenna, glad of any opportunity to pull Harker's mind from its dismal introspections. "Let's have a look at it, Ed, huh?"

Harker hesitated, then nodded. The two men went to the underside of the ship and stared in bemusement at the light green blades that were burgeoning there. "Funny," Harker murmured after a moment. "That earth should be baked harder than ceramic pottery. But it's soft beneath my feet."

"Uh-h-uh," McKenna agreed, pressing a toe into the near-elastic surface of the earth. "What do you make of it?"

Harker scratched his head behind one ear. "Damned if I know, Bill . . . Some sort of life-force, I'd guess. I mean, grass tends to regenerate no matter how badly it's treated, if the soil is good— But this soil wasn't, a little while ago. Maybe this planet isn't familiar with death—" His voice choked off, and he shut his eyes.

"Easy—" Bill McKenna cautioned him.

A yell from behind them made the two men turn and rush back to the shelter which housed the analyzer. A ruffled Alan Bochner was sprawled upon the grass, there, trying to maintain some vestiges of dignity as he clambered to his feet. His blouse was ripped with long diagonal gaps, and a faint tracing of pink scratches paralleled the rips upon the flesh beneath, looking painful but not serious. The door of the analyzer lay open, and the interior was empty.

"It *jumped* me!" he blurted, somewhat shaken from his wonted

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serenity of mien. "I heard the analyzer click off, and came back to look, and when I opened the door, that damned little beast *attacked* me!" He looked around him, suddenly, but there was no animal in sight. Off in the distance, fainter than the night wind, the three men could hear a fading rustle in the long grass.

Harker thought of pointing out, "Well, *you* attacked *it!*", but his erstwhile rancor had been replaced by a kind of warmly soothing joy, and he let the remark remain unspoken.

"How could any creature get pierced by one of those beams and be up and kicking in the next five minutes?" mumbled Alan Bochner, vainly trying to smooth his shredded uniform.

"Shall we go look for it, sir?" Harker said abruptly.

McKenna's head snapped up, and he gazed through the near-darkness at Harker's face, but found it unreadable. Bochner, involved with the futile smoothing of his ruined garb, only glanced up for a moment. "Good idea," he said. "I want to examine that thing thoroughly. You'd better take flashlights. I'll turn on the magnetic homing beam. This is too big a world to get lost on."

McKenna, feeling unaccountably uneasy, got two flashlights from the shelter, then he and Harker started across the grassy meadow toward the distant trees. Neither spoke. The only sound was the soft swish-and-clump of their passage. Abruptly, McKenna paused and laid a hand upon Harker's arm.

"You're going the wrong way, Ed . . ." he said. "That rustle was headed more to your right, I think."

"Seemed to me more like *this* way," said Harker, freeing his arm from the other man's grasp. He started forward again.

"The orchard!" snapped McKenna. "I *knew* there was something —! Ed, are you out of your mind?!" He hurried to keep pace with Harker, but when he attempted to grab him again, Harker struck his hand away with a stinging slap that sent the flashlight spinning off into the tall grass. "Hey—!" McKenna yelled in rising anger. Then a hard fist drove itself into the side of his jaw, and the ground seemed to leap up jarringly against his chest and face.

When he pushed himself up from the earth, shaking his head groggily, there was no sign of Ed Harker. He located his fallen flashlight by its steady blue-white glow in the depths of the grass, and stood in the middle of the open meadow, hesitantly. By rights, he should head directly back to Bochner, with a full report of the incident. Striking a fellow-officer, at least, did not carry the death-penalty, as striking Bochner would have. But Harker would be broken, surely, and dishonorably dis-

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charged from the service. McKenna, regulations or not, did not want the responsibility for ruining another's life and career. Not while there was a chance of covering up.

He reached up and tenderly felt the swollen, aching spot on his jaw where Harker's fist had connected. If he could find the other man, they'd have to cook up a story to account for it. When but two men were patroling alone a staunch refusal to name an antagonist was ridiculous. With even three, there was an element of doubt as to an assailant's identity. But Bochner already had shown signs of dissatisfaction with Harker. He would enjoy the opportunity of having to discipline him. And that, McKenna realized, he didn't want to be a party to. He began to run, then, toward the black wall in the gathering night that was the entrance to that alien orchard.

"Harker?" he called softly, from the first copse of trees at the onset of the area, keeping his voice as low as possible. There was no reply, the beam turned toward the ground to hide any telltale glow from being seen back at the ship, he moved forward into the orchard. The ground here, strangely, was as grassy as that of the open field, though the shade of the broad, squat trees should have impeded its growth. "If it can survive the rocket-fires," he mused to himself, "I guess it can survive anything—" His thought broke off as the circle of light fell upon Harker. The man looked up with a lazy grin, and waved a hand at McKenna. His other hand held a globular dull red piece of fruit, with a pulpy orange interior. It was half-devoured, and streaks of syrupy juice dribbled onto his blouse from his chin. "You damned fool!" said McKenna, lashing out with his boot and kicking the fruit right out of Harker's hand. It plopped wetly in the darkness.

Harker only shrugged. "There's more where that came from." He brushed the juice from his fingers onto his thighs, and got to his feet. McKenna warily took a backward step, his hand hesitating just over the blunt grip of his laser at his belt. Harker saw the incompleted motion and laughed. "What now, old friend? You and Bochner plan to analyze *my* corpse?"

"You stupid nut," said McKenna, almost sobbing his rage. "You could be brought back to Earth in irons for this! I ought to pistol-whip some sense into you—"

For answer, Harker rose on tiptoe, reached up into the foliage overhead, and plucked another succulent piece of the dull red fruit. "You should try some," he said. "It tastes like Persian melon with just a touch of lime juice."

McKenna felt his arms and shoulders trembling, and got control of himself. "Listen—" he said

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desperately, his rage submerged beneath genuine panic for his friend's future, "Ed—let's go back, now. Please. Wash that junk off your face and hands and come with me to the ship. I can say I tripped over a root or something and bashed my jaw against a tree-trunk . . ."

Harker's air of amused insolence softened, and he let the fruit fall into the grass, then. "Thanks," he said to McKenna. "I don't know why I'm taking out my feelings about Bochner on you, Bill. I—I think he *frustrates* me, more than anything. . . . I don't mean his lordly attitude. I mean his *blindness!* How any man can look around at a paradise like Vega IV and think of nothing but analyzing it for the Terran scientists—!"

"I know, I know," sighed McKenna. "But that's the way he is. It's probably why he's the captain, and we're the crew. I couldn't see anything worthwhile getting accomplished if a pair of esthetes like you and me were running things, could you?"

Harker shook his head and gave an unhappy chuckle. "No. No, I guess I can't. . . . Maybe I'm being too hard on the guy, at that. He *did* put on the CO_2 early—And made that remark about probably hating to leave when we finished up. . . ."

"Sure," said McKenna. "It's just that his job gets in the way. Underneath, he's probably as soft as either of us."

"Thanks for your kind words, Lieutenant," came a cold, flat voice out of the darkness behind McKenna. Then Captain Bochner was entering the orchard, flicking on the flashlight he had left dark during his approach. "I rather *thought* Harker was up to something when he offered to chase that cub-thing. It's not in him to volunteer for any *extra* work. Then, when I saw the lights coming over this way, toward the orchard, I knew he was —" Bochner broke off as his eyes fell upon the swollen purple bruise upon McKenna's jaw. He smiled, then, with a grimness that chilled McKenna's blood. "So?" he said. "As if just desertion wasn't enough, Harker, you had to—"

"Sir," interrupted McKenna, "it wasn't desertion—"

"Shut up, Mister!" snapped Bochner. "There's no other name for it. And the penalty is quite clearly stated in the manual." His laser was out and its muzzle pointed at Harker's stomach in an instant.

"You can-t—!" blurted McKenna, his hand flashing out to grab the Captain's wrist. The weapon crackled and hummed, its beam lancing hotly upward, deflected into the foilage of the overhanging tree. With a curse, Bochner jerked his arm free, and then he and McKenna fell beneath a shower of sliced-off branches, thick leaves

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and gibbous red fruit. When they had pried the tangled debris away and regained their feet, Harker was gone. Bochner stolidly holstered his laser, eyes deadly with a promise of vengeance.

"That's going on your record, Mister," he said to McKenna.

"I *hope* so!" spat his lieutenant. "So far, this trip, it's the only thing I have to be *proud* of!" He turned on his heel and started back through the dark meadow toward the ship. Bochner stared after him, nostrils dilated with suppressed fury, but said nothing. One man alone could not safely pilot a spaceship back to Earth. Even the two of them, if Harker were not found, would have a rough time of it. He was going to need McKenna. He'd already lost one man; another good flareup of tempers could cost him the other. With icy control, Bochner bent, retrieved his fallen light, and started back over the meadow after McKenna.

The next five days passed uneventfully. There was no sign of Harker, although—on McKenna's insistence that the other man was mentally disturbed and needed help—Bochner had consented to join him in a search of the area for one day. At the far end of the fruit orchard, they located a few prints of his boot-soles. Nothing more. Even McKenna was forced to agree that no more time than that could be wasted on Harker. The workload on the two remaining men was greater by half, now, and —finished or not—they would have to take off at the end of their two-month sojourn, or wait another eighteen months for Vega IV to be in a favorable relationship to Earth. True, they had the fuel to cruise the necessary semicircular orbit about the blazing star when it would lie between them and the Solar System, but it would leave them with no reserve in case of an emergency. They could save their power, besides, by utilizing the planet's orbital velocity to augment their own.

Leaves and fruits and grasses proved to be not greatly different in structure from Terran cousins. But the fauna of Vega IV seemed to avoid them deliberately. Since that first night, they had seen—save at a great distance—no other living creature. Even the birds had stopped flying over the meadow in which the spaceship stood. Their rainbow forms could be glimpsed soaring over the wooded areas, and their melodious trillings heard when the two men passed through the forest in search of specimens, but they were never near enough to kill or capture. McKenna, despite their assigned mission, took a kind of perverse, serves-him-right delight in Bochner's subsequent discomfiture. Bochner sensed this irrational contentment in his subordinate, but gave no sign. He dreaded the outcome of a battle

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with his only remaining aide, and as the days wore on even regretted his harsh attitude toward Harker. Something about Vega IV frightened him. He did not let himself dwell on the thought of being suddenly alone there.

For things kept disappearing.

None—thank heaven—of the Earth-brought things. But the samplings of botanical life, after analysis, would all at once not be found where they had been stored. Bochner didn't like it at all. He began imagining things, his mind peopling the ubiquitous tall grasses with tiny creatures like packrats, animals that lurked about unseen until his back was turned, then rescued their ravished bits of leaf and stem from the hands of the "aliens". It was an act too near to intelligence to be comfortable. *If* that was what was happening to the specimens. Bochner refused to consider any other possibility.

At the end of the second week, on a foray into the woods for bark-samples from a somewhat scabrous pink vine they had noted during a previous trip, they found Harker's clothing. It was untorn, so that precluded any theory of attack by a wild beast. Boots, blouse, thick woolen socks, shorts, holstered laser and underclothing were scattered along a more-or-less regular line through the trees, as though Harker had grown uncomfortable in them as he strolled, and had doffed the items one by one. It was not the act, the two knew without mentioning the fact aloud, of a rational human being. They'd taken their bark-samplings with many a sudden glance over-the-shoulder into the surrounding shrubbery, and had been glad to return to the sunlit breadth of the meadow once more.

"We've *got* to get specimens of the living creatures to analyze, Bill," said Bochner, toward the finish of their final week on Vega IV. As the day moved inexorably by, a mutual sense of uneasiness had thrown them into a first-name relationship. It made the alien night-noises less disquieting, somehow. "As it is, we're going to be disbelieved by quite a few folks back on Earth when we tell our disappearing-plant stories. The entire trip will be wasted if we don't get something more."

"*I'm* game, Alan," McKenna shrugged unhappily. "If I could get *close* enough to one of these creatures to shoot—!"

Bochner gave a dismal nod of understanding. "I think Harker may have been right about the life-force of this place. It's not, unfortunately, a factor which the analyzer makes any note of. But there's something, some intense vitality—a sort of eternal springtime gush of will-to-survive—that inhabits *everything* on this planet. Just watching the grasses grow makes me feel positively decrepit."

"Maybe nothing ever died here

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before we came," suggested McKenna, somberly. "We're a threat such as Vega IV has never known before. It's no wonder the animals avoid us."

"Still and all," muttered Bochner, "if that first-and-only animal could recover its viability within minutes of being struck down, I should think they'd have nothing to fear from us."

"Except the pain," said McKenna. "You're Christian enough to understand that, Alan. No matter how strong one's guarantee of immortality, it's no fun taking that one-time plunge. . . ."

He paused, then, as Bochner stood up. The senior officer was slowly raising an arm, pointing off toward the distant fringe of trees at the rim of the meadow. "Bill—There's something over there. . . ." Bochner said. "I barely caught a glimpse of it, through the trees, but it's there. Something big."

McKenna's laser was unholstered even before he reached his feet. "Let's go after it, then," he said. "You lead the way."

Together, in a steady jog, they traversed the meadow to the forested area, and plunged unhesitatingly into the green shadows of the underbrush. Up ahead, McKenna saw a flicker of white, a darting blur between the thick boles of the lowslung trees. "There—!" he shouted, crashing off in the direction of the creature. Bochner turned too quickly and sprawled face-down into the tangled bushes, but when McKenna turned to assist him, the man waved him off.

"I'm all right! Get going! Don't lose sight of it!"

McKenna bobbed his head in quick acquiescence, and began to run toward the last spot where he had glimpsed the creature. Behind him, he heard Bochner regain his feet and start to follow. As he ran, McKenna saw the thing again. A dim, chalk-white flash of motion, it was before him, then gone again. He jabbed the stud of his laser, and sent the beam in a sweep that felled a score of ancient trees before him. He couldn't be certain if he had struck the creature itself with the beam, but amid the brutal crashing of those rough trunks and limbs, he heard a short, anguished cry. "Come on!" he yelled back to the pursuing Bochner. "Over this way—!"

McKenna almost stumbled over the brink of a short precipice, but saved himself by grabbing at the smooth-topped stump of one of the beam-truncated trees. A narrow, shallow valley lay just before him, its bottom cluttered with fallen plant life. In the midst of the rustling green mass, something white was wriggling, pushing its determined way up through the leaves. . . . McKenna saw a bit of the creature then—it seemed to be covered from head to foot with

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velvet-soft white lather— No, those were feathers, curly white mounded feathers. A fleeting notion that they had captured some ungainly land bird—a ratite, flightless bird like the emu or cassowary—crossed his mind. But then he saw the face of the creature and turned away, retching, from the sight. Bochner, just bursting through the shrubbery behind McKenna, nearly collided with him. Seeing his face, he said, "What *is* it, Bill?"

"It's Harker," McKenna groaned. "Dear God in heaven, it's *Harker!*" He buried his face in his hands.

Bochner pressed past him, then, and looked with horror at the thing emerging from the green tangle below the lip of the precipice. The lieutenant was hideously transfigured.

Save for his eyes, nose, lips and cheeks, he was totally covered with soft white down. His very eyelashes were fluttery soft tendrils, the sort which used to be made into feather boas. From his shoulderblades jutted short stubby winglets, no larger than a robin's. Thrusting laterally from his kidneys were two larger wings, long and narrow like those of an albatross. His ankles sprouted buzzing small pinions, like a hummingbird's, like the *talaria* of the ancient god Mercury. From wrist to thigh, a fragile webbing stretched, nubbly with the chalky white down. Where the cartilaginous funnels of his outer ears had once stood, yet another pair of wings flapped and rustled as the thing that had been Ed Harker attempted to free itself. Without a second's thought, Bochner's laser was pointing toward the monstrous sight, his stomach churning with nausea as he made a natural man's automatic attempt to destroy anything so warped and unnatural.

Then Harker called out. "Wait —! Captain, don't!", and Bochner's weapon-hand faltered. "You don't understand, sir!" cried Harker, keeping his gaze locked upon the other man's eyes, half-mesmerizing him into immobility as he writhed to loosen the twisted vines and limbs that yet impeded his escape. "I'm all right! I'm what I *want* to be! It's freedom, sir, don't you *see?* From the moment I ate that fruit, I felt the change coming upon me."

"You— You *knew* this was happening?" choked out Bochner, fighting his rising gorge. "And you *let* it?" Behind him, an ashen-faced McKenna had finally nerved himself to turn and see the sight that would forever haunt his dreams.

"Haven't you ever yearned to fly, sir?" pleaded Harker, his down-surrounded face twisted with emotion. "Not in a plane, or a spaceship— But of your own self, like the birds! I can, now! I do!" He gestured upward, helplessly. "I

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was coming to this glade when McKenna's beam struck. I couldn't get airborne back there in the woods—" He was suddenly free of the leafy encumberances, and sprang lightly to the side of the steep slope, a flash of white motion the eye could hardly follow. But Bochner stood above him, an unmoving menace to escape, the laser still clenched in a white-knuckled fist. "Sir, if you'll only hear me out—!" begged the thing that had once been a man. "Please don't kill me—"

Bochner hesitated, his weapon dipping.

Then Harker, with a howling cry of triumph, soared upward past the faces of the two men like an embodied hurricane, the air screaming at the swiftness of his passage, and—many yards higher than the surrounding treetops—he looped backward, head over heels, arched his terrible feathered body, and swooped toward the freedom of the forest on the far side of the valley.

It was the beam from McKenna's weapon that cut him in half, high in the sunlit air of Vega IV.

. . .

And then, horror piling upon horror, his sundered body broke into even lesser parts. The slack-jawed head, its ear-pinions flailing, arced and looped mindlessly in the blizzard of broken feathers that the laser-beam had caused. The feet skied across the clearing, their hummingbird-wings struggling to uphold them, all the long way down. Arms and hands wafted torn webbing futilely in the air to bear away the chest and shoulders, while the kidney-wings tried to glide away with the remainder of the trunk. Bochner doubled up and vomited. In a few minutes, the last life-mad segment of the mutated Ed Harker had crashed and flopped and floundered and finally lain still.

Wiping his stained mouth on the back of his wrist, Alan Bochner turned to Lieutenant McKenna. "Help me gather him up," he wheezed, sick and miserable. "We'll take him back with us." Together, they began to seek out the pieces of that travesty of a human being.

When they blasted away from the planetary surface, that night, only a nagging sense of duty—or possibly neatness—made Bochner utilize the CO_2-nozzles at all. He would just as soon have watched the entire planet burn. In the freezing-locker of the ship's food-storage compartment, they kept what remained of Harker. By tacit agreement, each segment had been tightly wrapped in metal foil and canvas, and kept separate from the others. They didn't want to chance seeing what would occur should the parts be left free to recombine. Back upon Earth would be time enough for that. It would be a task for the Terran scientists. Neither

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Bochner nor McKenna wanted any part of it.

Earth was already swimming into view on the telescreen when McKenna discovered the freezer was empty. Canvas and foil, still fastened, lay tenantless. A frantic search of the ship showed them no sign of Harker's body, living or dead, not so much as a feather's worth.

"He must have just—evaporated . . ." McKenna said, when the two men met, defeated, in the control room. "Perhaps it explains what became of those bits of grass and leaf. . . ."

"I know," said Bochner. "Evaporated. In a spaceship, Bill. A closed system. Air and water constantly being reclaimed. And then used. By us."

McKenna stared at him, then looked at the twinkling blue-green orb growing upon the telescreen. "We're infected, I suppose," he said softly. "And, sooner or later. . . ."

"That's about the size of it," nodded Bochner. "Well? What do we do, Bill?"

"We don't have much choice," said his lieutenant, quietly.

The two men strapped themselves into the contour-cradles. Bochner adjusted the setting on the panel, then cut the rockets on full, until their course had turned at right-angles to its original direction, and the telescreen showed only the stark white gleam of Polaris. He let the rockets run until all the fuel was depleted. Then, beyond the ability to obey a countermand by his own superiors, he radioed his report to Earth. When it was finished, he disconnected the microphone.

Then Bochner and McKenna got out the chessboard and began to play an unhurried game, waiting for the malevolence of the "Glorious Fourth" to begin its work upon them. As it turned out, they had three days remaining to them before the horrors began.

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BOOKS

SOME MONTHS AGO, I MET A gentleman. His name is Chard Powers Smith, and he is a writer of repute in fields remote from science fiction. He is a New Englander, both by passionate attachment and by intellectual-literary personality, and he has been a New Englander long enough so that he could tell me (and did, at a delightful dinner, the day after I sought out his acquaintance) charming stories of college days at Yale at the time when *every* young gentleman kept a drawer-full of white gloves, to be worn once only and discarded.

I did not know such details as this when I first heard him speak, of course—but his appearance, accent, and rhetoric conveyed a total impression quite in keeping with the image I have tried to present with trifling detail here. The occasion was a rather impressively respectable literary gathering of the sort I seldom attend; this time I had gone to hear Arthur Clarke speak on the putative "two cultures." Mr. Smith's five-minute address to the group occurred during the discussion period following the program, and stemmed from some of Clarke's comments on sci-fi. The burden of the speech was, as nearly as I can paraphrase at this distance in time:

> *Man needs myth. We are not* able to live with raw truths. The Judaeo-Christian mythology nurtured our civilization, and has sustained it for two millenia; now it appears to be no longer appropriate to the needs of modern man. Science fiction seems to be serving in some ways as a makeshift, patchup mythology to those most conscious of the realities of our burgeoning scientific culture. Is it possible that a new myth of adequate scope and significance will emerge from s-f? And if not, where will it come from?

If I have misinterpreted, or mis-stated his intentions, or perhaps added unconsciously, too much of my own thinking to his actual words, I hope Mr. Smith will correct me; I will in turn pass on the correction. But I believe my paraphrase is reasonably accurate; in any case, it is the way I remember the statement, and close enough to the original to make clear my astonishment when I

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heard it delivered in the unmistakeable accents of literary Vermont.

Since then, I have ceased to be startled at the sources of new insights into s-f, *or* new insights through the use of it. This month, not entirely by happenstance, I am in a position to spread out a sampling of the variety of style, and diversity of origin, of some of the best new work being done in the way of modern myth-making. Some of it is what even the hardest-shelled buffs would call "real science fiction;" some is wildly surrealistic fantasy. (Most, I think, contains aspects of both.) Of the six authors involved, only two are "genre writers," whose names would ordinarily be associated with the s-f field: Cordwainer Smith and Ray Bradbury. The others are an Argentinian author well-known in this country primarily in esoteric literary circles, Jorge Luis Borges; a Spanish author, Jose Maria Gironella, known here before this time only for his (officially approved, Catholic-award-winning) historical novels of the Spanish Civil War; a Polish-born Frenchman, whose faintly fantasy-flavored work had already won a wide readership here, before his current best-seller, THE SKI BUMS—Romain Gary; and Jesse Bier, a young American author, a professor of American literature at Montana State University, with one previous book to his credit, the 1963 novel, TRIAL AT BANNOCK.

Let's start with Cordwainer Smith*, because *he* starts with a prologue to his book which speaks, to some extent, for all these writers:

> This is science fiction, yes. But is comes from your own time, your own world, even your own past.
>
> All I can do is work the symbols.
>
> The magic and the beauty will come of our own past, your present, your hopes, your experience. This may look alien, but it is really as close to you as your own fingers. Some people will like this very much. Many will not understand it and push it aside. That is their loss, reader, not yours, not mine.
>
> We two have this story between us . . .

Or more accurately, five stories, all novelettes, four from *Galaxy* ("Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons," "The Dead Lady of Clown Town," "The Ballad of Lost C'mell," and "A Planet Named Shayol"), and "Drunkboat," from *Amazing*.

You may have read some of these before, even if you are not a regular reader of either magazine; two have appeared in my own anthologies ("Shayol" and "Drunkboat," in the 6th and 9th "SF" Annuals), and I think "C'mell," at least, was reprinted elsewhere (A

*SPACE LORDS, **Cordwainer Smith**; Pyramid, 1965; 50¢; 206 pp.

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GALAXY READER?); but it won't matter—they take re-reading very well. And (unless you are one of those who 'push it aside'—and there *are* those who do), the chances are that when you have re-read once, you will do so again.

Perhaps it would be more to the point to say that they don't *need* rereading? Of the five, three came back to me from the depths of memory, as soon as I read the first page again—came back, not as plots or memories of something learned, but with all the color and sensation of personal experience. (Two are obvious: "Clown Town" was the third.) I reread these, too —as one listens again to well-loved music, or looks again at a favorite painting, for the renewed ritual of the experience, not for refreshment of the mind.

I suppose it is in the nature of myth (or fable, or poetic prophecy —or any other operative 'symbol working') that it not only improves on acquaintance, but cannot be fully savored until it has become completely familiar: only when the plot and characters are transparent with use, do the underlying meanings and insights show through clearly.

The publication of SPACE LORDS as a Pyramid Science Fiction paperback marks another point in the already high score of editor Don Bensen, (who might consider giving a course for other book editors on "How to read science fiction"); but it is even more unfortunate than usual that entrenched mainstream snobbishness will thus deprive the collection of the critical attention it should have, and might attain if it did not have *both* paperback and category strikes against it. The stories, in any case, will outlast the binding, and perhaps they will find their way meantime into more durable covers.

The two Bradbury volumes* at hand are reprints, and would not ordinarily be reported on here, since both were reviewed at the time of original publication (F&SF, May, 1963, and July, 1964). But in a discussion of this sort, two freshly available volumes of Bradbury short stories can hardly be ignored.

Ray Bradbury is probably the world's best-known s-f short story writer; to many people outside the field, he almost identifies 'science-fiction'; inside s-f, he is a controversial figure, much admired and much rejected by those of the True Faith.

I myself have very varied reactions to Bradbury—but then he is a varied man. I have at times railed against Bradbury as an

*R IS FOR ROCKET, and THE MACHINERIES OF JOY, Ray Bradbury; Bantam reprints, 1965; 50¢ and 60¢; 184 pp and 213 pp.

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anti-science-fiction writer. I find his sentimentality intolerably sticky at times; his nostalgias are not mine; the world of my childhood was so remote from his—or from his fantasies of it—that I am compelled (you see) to question whether that midwestern boyhood ever was or *could* be, except in the world of the American Dream (circa 1900). Bradbury-the-writer seems to step in and out of his own dreamy attic, onto the main street of the world *I* know. But when he does step out on the street, he does it with style, with integrity, and with the magic of that attic still inside him. (This attic-image, but the way, is not mine, but Bradbury's; I lifted it out of an interview with him in *Show* last year—a remarkably readable and solidly meaningful statement, about himself, his work, and his views on s-f. The "attic," which he spoke of figuratively, was the storage place for the accumulated experiences and enrichments of the past.)

It may be, then, precisely *because* he is looking at the world I know through eyes adjusted to the light of his own private world, that Bradbury at his best can show me such startling and sometimes beautiful new aspects of my own 'realities.' In any event, he is one of the most skillful 'symbol workers' in the business—and the business he is in is myth-and-magic making: the application of the quality of wonder in the human mind to the natural wonder of the universe and the mysterious wonder of life itself, and of *man* as a precious, special case of life.

Jose Maria Gironella's tripartite collection* is a curious and fascinating book, not readily classifiable in any way. The opening 40-page narrative, "Twilight," contains a detailed, powerful, and sometimes sickening, account of the author's two-year experience of an acute state of melancholia, accompanied by vivid hallucinations, visions, and 'psychic experiences;' the 16-page closing section, "'Fugitives," is a sort of scrapbook-compilation of sentences and paragraphs of writing produced during the illness. Between these, are eight short stories comprising the section, "Phantoms," all derived from the same visionary experiences.

The other-world reality of the stories is compelling; the closest parallel that comes to mind is Poe. And as with Poe, the symbols on which Gironella hangs his fantasies cover the whole range from religious and supernatural phenomena to the traditional apparatus of science fiction.

In "The Death of the Sea," he

*PHANTOMS AND FUGITIVES, Jose Maria Gironella; Sheed & Ward, 1964; $3.95, 177 pp; translated by Terry Broch Fontsere.

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uses the same frightening figure of finality Kurt Vonnegut manipulated so successfully in CAT'S CRADLE—but there is nothing else in common between the two. The Red Egg is the adventure story of a cancer cell seeking its nesting place; but it is neither a dramatized essay nor a horror story. "Miracle in the Village" makes use of the familiar idea of a man living backwards in time, to tell a tender love story.

The other stories use devices more familiar to outright fantasy, but in all of them, the use of the symbols is somehow *pure*—untainted, as it were, by any efforts at rationale or even relevancy to the usual world.

Gironella is, from the evidence of this book, a man of intense intellectual interests, and probing curiosity. He is also a profoundly religious Catholic, and presumably a Franco-patriot. His *real* world is remote enough from mine so that his perceptions of mutual realities might, in any case, bring me new insights. But these stories sprang from a vastly remote interior universe that might as well have been in an entirely different space-time—or indeed, actually *was*.

LABYRINTHS* is, by a few hairs (four pages, to be exact), not a reprint, but an "augmented edition" of the 1962 title published in boards by New Directions. (One story, "The God's Script," has been added—as well as some of the end-of-the-book informational material.) Again, there are three sections to the book: *Fictions, Essays,* and *Parables*—and I cannot say in this case which I found most exciting. There is no room, in a 'roundup' of this sort, to discuss the variety and significance of Borges' work; I prefer to wait, in any case, till I have in hand his other recent volume, DREAM-TIGERS. I do not know whether Borges is as familiar with standard s-f writing as s-f readers have been, mostly, *un*familiar with his work; if not, the man seems to have invented for himself virtually every major concept the field as a whole has produced in half a century—and they are all here, tightly packed, sometimes only outlined, occasionally written in full emotional depth.

But whether he casts the work in the form of short story, parable, or essay, and whether he sketches or paints in full color, the man combines, on every page, so much intellectual ferment and such impactful symbolism, that it is only afterwards one realizes the star-

*LABYRINTHS, Jorge Luis Borges, edited by Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby; New Directions, 1964 (NDP #186); $1.90; 251 pp. plus Chronology, Bibliography, Introduction, & Preface by Andre Maurois.

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tling quality of the prose itself. (If this seems strong statement, it is stronger than you thought: the quality of the language seeps through half a dozen different translators with almost equal effectiveness.)

There will be more on this in a month or two. Meantime, there remain two volumes to discuss, which are not primarily s-f collections, but deserve mention here not only for the handful of genre stories, but for some of the others in each book which are informed by the same spirit, while adhering to a different code of letters.

Romain Gary's work has always displayed a remarkable apprehension of the essential wonder of our times—the constant startlement, fear, awe, magnificence, which are implicit in this Age of Change (to what, we know not, but the change is constant and cumulative). HISSING TALES* contains two outright s-f stories. "Decadence" might be described a contemporary Goya etching, portraying a Syndicate Boss caught in the toils of Art, caught in turn in the talons of the Organization People; or you could call it a charming sophisticated farce on Labor, Crime, Art, and assorted hangers-on. "New Frontiers" is a quietly horrible (or perhaps slyly delightful?) end-of-the-world (or beginning?) surreality, having to do with man's return to the seas.

Jesse Bier,* whose work I have not read before, emerges as another writer of intense awareness, though (not yet at least) with Gary's sophistication and stylistic skills. Again there are two stories with outright elements of (in this case) fantasy: "Father and Son," and "Migdone." "Father and Son" is a what-if about the end of World War II in Germany; but don't think you've read it before. Its proposition is different and terrifying; its resolution somewhat disappointing—maybe necessarily so? I think there is no answer yet to the ethical questions involved in punishment for genocide. "Migdone" is the story of a man with a mote in his eye; or you can read it as a ghost story, or if you prefer, as a psychiatric study. Its mood was evocative for me of a story I think possibly the best instance of modern-gothic—Leiber's "Smoke Ghost."

And, as with Gary's collection, much of the other work lies only marginally across the borderline between fantastic and realistic literature; the title story, in particular, has all the elements of good s-f—except of course the essential one of extrapolation.

—JUDITH MERRIL

*HISSING TALES, Romain Gary; Harper & Row, 1964; $4.95, 186 pp.

*A HOLE IN THE LEAD APRON, Jesse Bier; Harcourt, 1964; $4.50, 248 pp.

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POEMS, by C. S. Lewis, edited by Walter Hooper, Harcourt, $4.50.

C. S. Lewis published forth poetry in many diverse places for fifty years, all of it creditable. Some of it is noble, beautiful and exact. It is frequently amused and, as often as he means it to be, amusing. The man was a literary historian and critic, professor of mediaeval and Renaissance English at Cambridge, and one of those tough and resilient grapplers with religion who had left the church and returned to it in the middle of his life with great conviction. All of these qualities can be seen in all his work, and I do not believe he knew how to do a thing badly. Yet, while this posthumous volume is a continuous delight, the mantle of the poet is one that he wore, I think, only in odd moments. His greater achievement, his most memorable lines, can be found elsewhere in the body of his work, as in THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH, the diabolically clever SCREWTAPE LETTERS, and TILL WE HAVE FACES. Yet, with this reservation, it is not inordinate praise to say that the occasional poems of a man so skilled in the arts of language and theology are far better reading than a great deal that passes for poetry nowadays. There is a handful of poems of specifically science-fictional interest: but *Prelude to Space, Science-Fiction Cradlesong,* and *An Expostulation* will not particularly please the hard-core science-fiction fan—but in all likelihood neither does the great trilogy. For those who enjoy his novels, the POEMS of C. S. Lewis will be a lesser joy, but a joy, throughout.

—VIRGINIA KIDD

THIS MONTH'S COVER by Chesley Bonestell pictures three space ships spiralling out from Mars for the return trip to Earth. The ion powered engines (which give off the characteristic blue glow) provide a low thrust and acceleration, and the ships must spiral out at a greater and greater velocity until they reach escape velocity. The prominent dark feature on Mars is Syrtis Major, and the southern polar cap appears to the lower left. Thoth is the curved feature extending from the gray area toward the north pole. *This painting appears in* BEYOND THE SOLAR SYSTEM *by Chesley Bonestell and Willy Ley, Viking Press, 1964.*

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It is Samuel Johnson the conversationalist that we remember, not Johnson the writer. "A tavern chair," he said, "is the throne of human felicity"—and during the last third of his life, he sat enthroned, talking. His faithful recorder was James Boswell, and in the story below, Robert F. Young draws upon one of their first meetings to give us another fine variation on a classic fantasy theme.

MINUTES OF A MEETING AT THE MITRE

by Robert F. Young

THE ORIGINAL OF THE FOLLOWing literary fragment was among the batch of Boswelliana recently found in the west tower of the castle of Cernach, County Cork, Ireland, and every indication points to its having been included in an earlier version of *The Life of Samuel Johnson*. Although the biographer's reasons for excluding it from the final manuscript were buried with him and cannot be dug up again, we are, nevertheless, justified in drawing the following tentative conclusions: (1) that upon rereading the passage in question, Boswell realized that Dr. Dickens had not specified exactly what kind of immortality he had in mind; (2) that Boswell simultaneously realized that there was a quality about Dr. Johnson's role in the affair that did not quite meet the eye; and (3) that Boswell concluded it would be better for all parties concerned if the public were to consider Johnson as owing that to a Biographer, which Providence had enabled him to obtain for himself.

Connaught on the Snithe
January 17, 1988

On Saturday, the 2nd of July,

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1763, I again supped at the *Mitre* with Dr. Johnson and Dr. Goldsmith. It happening to be a very rainy night, with a pronounced chill in the air, we chose a table next to the hearth, wherein a small fire was being maintained on the grate for the physickal comfort of the patrons, few of which, owing to the unfavourable disposition of the weather, were present.

As he had done on the preceding evening, Dr. Goldsmith attempted to maintain that knowledge was undesirable on its own account because it is frequently a source of unhappiness. Johnson, who, as we have already seen, disdained this attitude, countered with a smile of ridicule. "Sir (said he), is it your contention that the scullery maid who plucks the chicken is less happy than the cook who prepares it for the table because the cook is better acquainted with the fowl's physickal properties?" GOLDSMITH: "No, sir, I do not contend such to be the truth, for unhappiness resulting from knowledge comes only in the higher spheres, where knowledge elevates the traveller to lofty plateaus from which he views the world in all its petty imperfections. Faust was not a happy man." JOHNSON: "He was unhappy not because of his lore, but because of the manner in which he came by it."

This preliminary parley introduced a good supper, of which Johnson partook as enormously as he did of the wine which followed. Gradually, the veins which, during the repast, had swelled out on his forehead, subsided; and the perspiration, which the intensity of his appetite had brought into being, dwindled to a faint film of moisture. A tall, grey-suited man of indeterminate age, narrow of countenance, pale of skin, and with dark, glowing eyes, had in the meantime taken up a position before the hearth. He apologized for his proximity, saying that he was extremely susceptible to the chill and was seeking to ward it off by the only means available. He introduced himself as Dr. Dickens, whereupon Johnson bade him join us at our table.

JOHNSON (after our guest had seated himself): "Sir, the influence of a moist atmosphere upon the human frame is much overemphasized in the world. London is not the worse for its climate, but the better." DICKENS: "In that, I fear I cannot concur." JOHNSON: "London, sir, is a state of mind." DICKENS: "A most melancholy one."

Johnson ordered the serving maid to bring more wine. Dr. Dickens, however, declined a glass when it was proffered him, although he of all those present seemed most in need of it. Indeed, there was an intense pallor

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present in his face, a pallor made to seem all the more acute by the thinness of his cheeks and the burning quality of his eyes. I could not forbear commenting, however indirectly, upon his unhealthy appearance. "Can it be, sir (said I), that you are used to a warmer and more consistent climate and have not as yet become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of London weather?"

"I shall never become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of London weather (said he), no more than I shall ever become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of London lexicographers."

Although it was toward myself that this observation was addressed, it was toward Dr. Johnson that the pale man's burning gaze was directed. Johnson returned the gaze, if not in kind, then in spirit. "Why, sir (said he), I consider the idiosyncrasies of both to be beyond reproach; but, although you endeavoured to cloak your scurrilous remark in ambiguity, I perceive that I alone inspired it; and I must conclude, therefore, that I am the lexicographer to whom you specifically refer." DICKENS: "There is none other to whom I could be referring, there being in the British Isles at this time none of comparable renown or of comparable asininity."

My indignation was of such magnitude that it was beyond my ability to repress it. BOSWELL: "Sir, how dare you address Dr. Johnson in so disrespectful a manner?" GOLDSMITH: "How dare you, sir, indeed!" DICKENS: "I both dare to and have done so."

Johnson blew out his breath like a whale and swallowed three glasses of port. "Sir (said he), I perceive you are a vile Whig." DICKENS; Sir, I am more than that: I am the first Whig." JOHNSON: "Then, sir, you are the Devil." DICKENS: "Precisely."

Johnson blinked one of his eyes. Then, unexpectedly, he smiled. "Can it be then, sir (said he), that you have come to bargain for my soul? If so, have you not presumed too much? I did not invoke you." DICKENS: "You invoked me deliberately, and you know it, when you imputed Faust's *Weltschmerz* to the pact he made with me. But that would not have been sufficient, *per se*, to have caused me to forsake my warm and cheerful fireside for this dismal fog bank you call London and this wretched grotto of gluttony you call the *Mitre*. Only because your remark culminated your affronts to me was I forced to come. I overlooked your writing 'Hell' off in your spiteful lexicon as 'the place into which the taylor throws his shreds' and I overlooked your writing *me* off in the same outrageous lucubration as 'a ludicrous term for mischief'. But I cannot

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and I will not overlook three examples of your cynical asperity in a row. Yes: I have come to bargain for your soul, sir; and you are going to sell it to me." JOHNSON: "And what shall I receive in return?" DICKENS: "Immortality, of course." JOHNSON (with a smile of triumph): "Very well, sir, I will sell it to you. And afterward, sir, I suggest that you do myself and my companions the courtesy of unburdening our good company with your uncivil presence."

From the interior of his grey coat, Dickens produced a document with a bright-red border and spread it out on the table before Dr. Johnson. He next called the serving maid, and bade her bring quill and ink. JOHNSON (with a roar of mocking laughter): "What—you do not want it signed in blood?" DICKENS: "Sir, you would do well to pay less attention to old wives' tales and more to the world around you. When signed in ink, one of my contracts is as binding as one of yours is. That line right there at the bottom, please. Where it says 'signature of litterateur'."

Both my legal instincts and my awareness of Dr. Johnson's notoriously poor eyesight caused me to lean forward in an attempt to discern what was written on the paper. In this, I was thwarted by none other than Johnson himself, who, almost as though he did not want me to see the contents of the document, turned sideways so that his massive shoulder intervened between my eyes and the page. "Sir (said I), might it not be the better part of wisdom to permit me to act as your representative in this matter?" JOHNSON (signing his name with a flurish): "No, no, Boswell. Let us be rid of this blockhead once and for all. What court of law would ever uphold such a ludicrous negotiation?" DICKENS: "One of mine."

I did not like the expression of self-satisfaction on the man's countenance; but Dr. Johnson was right, and he had signed his name for no other reason than to get rid of this demented dolt who fancied himself to be none other than Old Nick himself; and as for the contract, Johnson was right about that too: no court of law would ever uphold such a ridiculous agreement; and even were a court to do so, the paradox inherent in the terms would invalidate them, for a man who has been rendered immortal retains his soul forever, and could not part with it even if he wanted to.

Dickens, seemingly divining my thoughts, had fixed me with a gaze of such intensity that when I met his burning eyes, my mind reeled. I felt as though hot, invisible fingers were digging into my brain, arranging this pattern of thought and re-arranging that. The sensation did not last long (indeed, in retrospect, I am not

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certain that I experienced it at all), and after a moment, Dickens lowered his gaze, returned the document to the interior of his coat, and stood up. He stepped over to the hearth and resumed his position before the grate, and when next I looked, he was gone.

Dr. Johnson, meanwhile, had resumed his conversation with Goldsmith, who, as usual, was endeavouring to *shine*. JOHNSON: "Why, sir, in making such a prognostication, you are assuming Fielding to have been a literary giant. This is manifestly untrue." GOLDSMITH: "But in *Tom Jones* he penned a masterpiece that virtually ensures his immortality." JOHNSON: "Pish. It is not for what they write during their lifetimes that literary men are remembered by posterity, but for what they *say*." GOLDSMITH: "But sir, who will ever know what they said if they were too indolent to write it down?" JOHNSON: "The wise man sees to it that it *is* written down."

It was shortly following this meeting at the *Mitre* that my mind began to be impregnated with what I have already referred to, for lack of a more scientifick term, as *the Johnsonian aether*, and soon afterward I began committing to paper the exuberant variety of Dr. Johnson's wisdom and wit. I have since had no cause to regret my assiduousness in this matter, for it, together with the various letters, papers, &c. which I have collected, has enabled me to execute my labors with a facility which would otherwise have been impossible.

On Sunday, the 3rd of July, it was my pleasure to attend one of the *levees* for which Dr. Johnson was so famous at the time. I found him sur—

(Here the fragment ends.)

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THE LAND OF MU

by Isaac Asimov

WHEN I WAS IN MY EARLY TEENS, I found a book in the public library that seemed fascinating. It was "The Lost Continent of Mu" by James Churchward and I took it out exultantly.

The disappointment was keen. I may have been young, but I wasn't so young as not to recognize nonsense. This was my first encounter with the "serious" literature spawned by the Atlantis legend (as opposed to honest science fiction) and I needed no second.

If you want to know more about the Atlantis myth, about Lemuria and Mu, and so on, don't look for it here. I refer you to an amusing and interesting book by a gentleman with the highest rationality quotient I have ever met: "Lost Continents" by L. Sprague de Camp (Gnome Press, 1954).

For myself, I will go no further into the subject except to say that the Land of Mu was a hypothetical continent that filled the Pacific Ocean and that, like Atlantis, allegedly sank beneath the waves, after having supposedly harbored a high civilization.

Utter bilge, of course, and yet there is a queer coincidence that crops up.

Churchward could not have known, when he wrote his first book on Mu in 1926, that the time would come when the word "Mu" would gain a certain significance in science. This significance rests chiefly in the problems that have arisen in connection with "Mu". These problems, far from being solved, or even moving toward solution, have, in the last quarter-century, grown steadily more puzzling and intense until now, in the mid-sixties, the daintiest and most succulent enigmas of the nuclear physicist rest right on "Mu."

There *is* a land of Mu, in a manner of speaking, and it is far more

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fascinating and mysterious than the murky lost continent of Churchward's fog-ridden imagination.

Let me tell you about the real Land of Mu, Gentle Readers—

As usual, I will start at the beginning; and the beginning, in this case, is my article BEHIND THE TEACHER'S BACK printed only two months ago in the August, 1965 issue of this estimable periodical. In that article, I described the efforts made to account for the existence of atomic nuclei despite the strong mutual repulsion of the protons contained in those nuclei.

To allow the nucleus to exist, the Japanese physicist, Hideki Yukawa, had found it necessary to postulate the existence of a particle intermediate in mass between the proton and the electron. In 1936, such a particle was found and was promptly named the "mesotron" from the Greek word "mesos" meaning "in the middle" or "intermediate." A syllable was saved by shortening this name to "meson."

Unfortunately, there were two flaws to this happy discovery. The first was that the meson was just a little on the light side. This, however, might not be serious. It might easily turn out that there were factors Yukawa hadn't correctly taken into account in his reasoning.

The second flaw was less easily dismissed. The whole point of the meson was that if it were to serve as the "cement" of the atomic nucleus, it would have to interact very rapidly with the protons and neutrons within that nucleus. It should, indeed, react with a proton, for instance, in not much more than a trillionth of a trillionth of a second. A stream of mesons striking a group of nuclei ought to be gulped up at once.

But this didn't happen. A stream of mesons, shooting forward at great energies, can pass through inches of lead. In doing so, the mesons must carom off vast numbers of atomic nuclei and not be absorbed by them.

For a dozen years, that irritated physicists. A particle had been predicted; it was found; and it proved not to be the particle that was predicted. Fortunately, in 1948, a second meson was found, a little more massive than the first, and it *did* react virtually instantaneously with nuclei. The second meson checked out perfectly as Yukawa's predicted particle and physicists have had no cause to question that conclusion since.

It was now necessary to distinguish between the two mesons by name, and one good way was to make use of Greek letter prefixes, a common habit in science.*

* *I keep planning to write an article on the Greek alphabet and its use in science and somehow I don't get around to it.*

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For instance, the first meson had precedence to the right to have the prefix "m" for "meson". The Greek letter-equivalent of "m" is μ which, in English, is called "mu".† Therefore, the first meson, the one which is *not* Yukawa's particle, was named the "mu-meson" and that is more and more frequently being abbreviated to "muon."

The second meson, which *is* Yukawa's particle, was first discovered among the products of cosmic ray bombardment (the "primary radiation") of the upper atmosphere. It therefore should have the initial "p" for "primary." The Greek letter-equivalent of "p" is π which, in English, is called "pi." Therefore, Yukawa's particle became the "pi-meson" or "pion."

Suppose, now, we set the mass of the electron at 1, and consider the masses of the two mesons and of the proton and neutron:

electron	1
muon	206.77
pion	273.2
proton	1836.12
neutron	1838.65

If we look at this group of particles, we can say that the atom is made up of a nucleus, containing protons and neutrons held together by pions, and that outside that nucleus are to be found electrons. Here are four different particles, all essential to atomic structure.

But that leaves the muon; the mu-meson; the particle which we can name, if we are feeling romantic enough, the physicists' "Land of Mu." What does it do? What function does it serve?

Do you know that it is just about thirty years now since the muon was discovered and physicists still don't know what it does or what function it serves.

This puzzle—the first of the Land of Mu—is not as acute as it might be. In the 1950's and 1960's, other particles were discovered by the dozens. There then arose the question of accounting for the existence and function of a large number of particles and not the muon only.

There is the feeling now that what is needed is a general theory covering subatomic particles as a whole. Indeed such general theories are now being advanced, but this essay is not the place to discuss them.

†*The continent of Mu, concerning which Churchward wrote, has no connection at all with the Greek letter, mu, but I am building this article on the coincidence all the same.*

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However, other problems arose in connection with the muon that apply strictly to the muon and to no other particle; and concerning which physicists haven't yet the foggiest beginning of an answer.

Suppose we compare the muon and the electron, for instance.

Item 1: The electron carries a negative electric charge, arbitrarily set equal to unit-size, so that its charge is described as −1. It has a positively charged twin, the positron (charge, +1). There is, however, no such thing as a "neutral electron" (charge, 0).

Should there be? Well, there is a "neutral proton" (charge, 0) which we call a neutron, which is a trifle more massive than a proton (charge, +1) or its twin, the anti-proton (charge, −1). There is a neutral pion (charge, 0), which is a trifle less massive than the positive pion (charge, +1) or its twin the negative pion (charge, −1).

Nevertheless, although the proton and pion can exist in uncharged form, the electron apparently cannot. At least a neutral electron has never been detected and there is no theoretical reason to suspect that it might exist.

Now the muon. There is a negative muon (charge, −1) and a positive muon (charge, +1) but there is no neutral muon.

Indeed, in May, 1965 (three days ago, as I write this) the results of an experiment were announced in which streams of muons and of electrons were bounced off protons. From the nature of the scattering one could calculate the volume over which the electric charge of a muon and of an electron were spread. No difference could be detected in the two particles. We can conclude then that in terms of nature and distribution of charge, the muon and electron are indistinguishable.

Item 2: Subatomic particles have a property which can be most easily described as spin about an axis. The spin of an electron (or positron) can be expressed as either +½ or −½. The spin of a muon (either negative or positive) can also be expressed as either +½ or −½. In terms of spin, then, the muon and electron are indistinguishable.

Item 3: The spin of the electron (or positron) sets up a magnetic field whose strength can be expressed as 1.001160 Bohr magnetons. The spin of the muon (either negative or positive) sets up a magnetic field of strength equal to 1.001162 Bohr magnetons. The difference is quite unimportant and in terms of magnetism, too, then, the muon and electron are just about indistinguishable.

Item 4: The electron and muon can take part (or fail to take part) in certain interactions with other particles. For instance:

a) A pion is an unstable particle which, left to itself, breaks down in

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a couple of hundredths of a microsecond.* When it breaks down, it may produce a muon and a neutrino; or it may produce an electron and a neutrino.† In brief, either an electron or a negative muon can be produced by the breakdown of a negative pion; either a positron or a positive muon can be produced by the breakdown of a positive pion.

b) An electron has very little tendency to interact with atomic nuclei; it tends to remain outside the nucleus. A muon has very little tendency to interact with atomic nuclei; it tends to remain outside the nucleus. In fact, negative muons can replace electrons in their orbits about nuclei, producing what are called "mesonic atoms." No doubt, positive muons could replace positrons in their orbits about the nuclei of antimatter to produce "anti-mesonic atoms."

c) It is possible for an electron and its positively-charged twin, the positron, to circle each other for short intervals of time, making up a neutral system called "positronium." It is also possible for the electron to circle a positive muon in place of the positron, to form "muonium." Undoubtedly, a positron can circle a negative muon to form "antimuonium", and a negative muon can circle a positive muon to form something for which, as far as I know, no name has yet been coined ("mumuonium"?)

We can conclude then that as far as the nature of particle interactions in which electrons and muons can take part is concerned, the two are indistinguishable.

In fact, as physicists examined the muon more and more thoroughly through the 1950's, it began to dawn upon them that the muon and electron were identical.

Well, almost identical. There remained two important points of difference.

The first involves the matter of stability. The electron and positron are each stable. An electron or a positron, alone in the universe, will never (as far as we know) alter its nature and become anything else.

The muon, however, is unstable. Even if alone in the universe, it will break down, after an average lifetime of 2.2 microseconds. The negative muon will break down to an electron and a couple of neutrinos, while a positive muon will break down to a positron and a couple of neutrinos.

This certainly seems to be a tremendous distinction between electron and muon, but, oddly enough, it isn't. A microsecond is a brief interval of time on the human scale but not on the subatomic scale. On the sub-

** A microsecond is equal to a millionth of a second, or 10^{-6} seconds.*
† I'll have something to say about neutrinos later in the article.

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atomic scale there are reactions and breakdowns that take place in 10^{-23} seconds. The pion interactions that serve to hold an atomic mucleus together take place in such an interval of time.

If we take 10^{-23} seconds as a normal interval of time on the subatomic scale; short but not extraordinarily short; we might compare it to 1 second on the human scale. In that case 10^{-6} seconds, which is a hundred quadrillion times as long as 10^{-23} seconds, would be the equivalent of three billion years on the human scale. If we consider the muon from the viewpoint of the subatomic world, it lasts billions of years and surely that is "practically forever."

The difference between an electron that lasts forever and a muon that lasts practically forever is not great enough to bother a physicist.

You yourself may, however, feel more hard-headed than a physicist. "Practically forever" is not "forever" you may exclaim, and six billion years is not eternity.

In that case, look at it another way. When subatomic particles break down, the tendency is to form a lighter particle, provided none of the rules of the game are broken. Thus, when a negative muon breaks down it forms the negatively-charged, but lighter electron. The mass decreases but the electric charge remains, for the rules of the game decree that electric charge may not vanish.

The electron, however, cannot break down for there is no particle less massive than itself that carries an electric charge. The charge must remain and therefore the electron, willy-nilly, must remain.

The positron remains stable, too, because there is no particle less massive than itself that carries a positive electric charge.

(Of course, an electron and a positron can undergo mutual annihilation, for the negative charge of the first cancels the positive charge of the second. The total charge of the two particles before annihilation is $+1$ plus -1, or 0, so that no *net* charge is destroyed.)

In short, the fact that the electron lasts forever and the negative muon lasts only practically forever is entirely a matter of the difference in mass. We can ignore the difference in stability, then, as a purely derivative matter and pass on to the difference in mass, which seems essential.

The negative muon is 206.77 times as massive as the electron; the positive muon is 206.77 times as massive as the positron. Up through 1962, all other differences between these two sets of particles seemed to stem directly from this difference in mass.

The case of stability versus instability is a case in point. Here is another. When a meson replaces an electron in its orbit about an atomic nucleus, to form a mesonic atom, the meson must have the same angular

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momentum as the electron. The angular momentum increases with mass and also with distance from the center of rotation. Since the meson is over 200 times as massive as the electron, it must make up for that increased mass by decreasing its distance from the center of rotation (the nucleus) correspondingly. In very massive atoms, which ordinarily draw their innermost electrons into close quarters indeed, the meson drawn closer still, actually circles within the nucleus's outer perimeter. The fact that the muon can circle freely within the nucleus shows how small the tendency is for the muon to interact with protons or neutrons. (It also raises puzzling questions as to the nature of the inner structure of the nucleus.)

In addition, the electrons of an atom in shifting from energy level to energy level, typically emit or absorb photons of visible light. The more massive meson shifts over energy gaps that are correspondingly greater. The photons such atoms emit or absorb are over 200 times as energetic as those of visible light and are in the x-ray region.

The peculiar structure of a mesonic atoms and its ability to emit or absorb x-rays can thus be seen to be merely another consequence of the great mass of the muon.

Here is still another example. A pion, in breaking down, can form either a muon or an electron. One might think that, if the muon and electron were exactly alike, each ought to form with equal probability and as many electrons as muons ought to be formed.

This, however, is not so. For every electron formed, 7000 muons are formed. Why is that?

According to the theory of such interactions, the probability with which a muon or an electron is formed depends on how far short of the speed of light, the speed of the particle formed happens to be. The electron is a very light particle and at the moment of formation is fired out at almost the speed of light. Its speed is only slightly less than the speed of light and the probability of its formation is correspondingly small.

The muon, however, is over 200 times as massive as the electron and is therefore considerably more sluggish. Its velocity, when formed, is quite a bit less than the speed of light and the probability of its formation rises correspondingly. The difference between the quantity of muons formed in pion breakdown and the quantity of electrons again boils down to a consequence of the difference in mass.

Physicists have therefore taken to looking at the negative muon as nothing more than a "massive electron" and at the positive muon as a "massive positron."

And that is the second puzzle from the physicists' Land of Mu. Why

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should the muon be so much more massive than the electron? And just 206.77 times as massive, no more or less? No one knows.

For that matter, why should this huge difference in mass make so little difference in respect to charge, spin, magnetic field, and type of interactions undergone? No one knows.

And even yet we are not done. I've saved the most recent and most tantalizing puzzle for last.

There are certain massless, chargeless particles called neutrinos which have, as their twins, anti-neutrinos. (They are opposite in terms of the direction of their magnetic fields.) These particles, which are discussed in a bit of detail in my article HOT STUFF (F & SF, July 1962) are particularly associated with electrons and positrons.

When an electron is formed in the course of a particle breakdown, an anti-neutrino is formed along with it. When a positron is formed, a neutrino is formed along with it.

When a negative muon is formed in the course of a particle breakdown, an anti-neutrino is formed along with it, too. And, of course, when a positive muon is formed, there comes the neutrino.

At first it was thought that since the muon was more massive than the electron, the neutrino produced along with muons ought to be more massive than those produced along with electrons. Consequently, physicists distinguished among them by speaking of a "neutretto" as being associated with muons.

However, the closer they looked at the "neutretto", the less massive it seemed to be until, finally, they decided the "neutretto" was massless.

But the only difference between muon and electron was mass, and if that difference was wiped out between the neutretto of one and the neutrino of the other, there was no difference left.

Both were neutrinos (and anti-neutrinos). Physicists decided then that the muon's neutrino (and anti-neutrino) and the electron's neutrino (and anti-neutrino) were the same particle in every respect. This seemed but another example of how the electron and muon could not be distinguished except by mass and mass-derived properties.

Yet one problem remained. When a negative muon broke down, it formed an electron and *two* neutrinos. From theoretical considerations, it was necessary to consider one of those neutrinos a neutrino and the other an anti-neutrino.

But a neutrino and an anti-neutrino should be able to annihilate each other and leave nothing behind but electromagnetic radiation.

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In that case, a negative muon should break down to form an electron as the only particle. And a positive muon should break down to form a positron as the only particle. At least, this should be observed once in a while.

However, it was *never* observed. The neutrino and anti-neutrino were always formed in the breakdown of either the negative or positive muon and never annihilated each other. Physicists began to wonder if perhaps the neutrino and anti-neutrino didn't annihilate each other because they *couldn't* annihilate each other. Perhaps there were two kinds of neutrinos and two kinds of anti-neutrinos after all, one set associated with electrons and one with muons, and perhaps the neutrino of one set could not annihilate the anti-neutrino of the other.

Could it be then that a negative muon broke down to form 1) an electron, 2) an electron-anti-neutrino, and 3) a muon-neutrino? And could a positive muon break down to form 1) a positron, 2) an electron-neutrino, and 3) a muon-anti-neutrino?

If so, that would explain the facts of muon breakdown. Nevertheless, the possibility of two kinds of neutrinos seemed too much to swallow without additional evidence.

In 1962, therefore, at Brookhaven, Long Island, a "two-neutrino experiment" was set up and carried out. High-energy protons were smashed into a bervllium target under conditions that formed a high-energy stream of positive and negative pions. These broke down almost at once to positive and negative muons. The positive muons, when formed, were accompanied by muon-neutrinos, while the negative muons, when formed, were accompanied by muon-anti-neutrinos.

Before the muons had a chance to break down, the stream struck a wall of armor plate about 45 feet thick. All pions and muons were stopped, but the muon-neutrinos and muon-anti-neutrinos went right on through. (Neutrinos can pass through light-years of solid matter without being stopped.)

On the other side of the armor plate, the neutrinos and anti-neutrinos had a chance to interact with particles. They did this only very rarely, but every once in a while one of them did. A neutrino (charge, 0) could strike a neutron (charge, 0), for instance, and form a proton (charge, +1).

The rules of the game, however, say that you can't form a positive electric charge out of nothing. If one is formed, then a particle with a negative electric charge must be formed simultaneously so as to keep the total charge zero.

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Therefore when a neutrino and neutron combine to form a proton, they also form either an electron or a negative muon, since either of them can supply the necessary charge of —1 to balance the proton's +1.

All the neutrinos in question were formed along with muons and are therefore muon-neutrinos. If the muon-neutrinos were indeed different from electron-neutrinos, then only muons should be formed. If the muon-neutrinos were identical with electron-neutrinos, then the neutrinos could be considered as associated with either, and some of each ought to be formed. They might not be formed in equal numbers, for the mass difference might apply, but they ought to be formed.

However, in the first experiment and in all that followed, muons, and muons only, have been formed. Electrons have never been observed.

The conclusion is that there are indeed two different neutrino/antineutrino pairs; one pair associated with electrons and positrons, and one pair associated with negative and positive muons.

And there is the third puzzle from the physicists' Land of Mu. What in blazes is the difference between a muon-neutrino and an electron-neutrino?

Both are massless. Both are chargeless. Both have a spin of ½. Put each in isolation and the physicist cannot imagine how to distinguish one from the other.

But the neutron can tell. It will interact with one of them to form a proton and a muon, and with the other to form a proton and an electron. And how does the neutron tell the two neutrinos apart when we can't?

No one knows.

There you have the physicists' Land of Mu. Compare all this with Churchward's Land of Mu which could produce nothing more than the imaginary sinking of a mythical continent, and tell me where the true romance lies.

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Jazz and science fiction share several characteristics, among which are a freedom from inhibition and a penchant for surprise. There is a good deal about jazz in this poignant story by Robert J. Tilley, but you will not have to recognize the tunes to appreciate an unusually fine performance—one which says more about communication and alienation than any story we have read in a long time.

SOMETHING ELSE

by Robert J. Tilley

THE EQUATORIAL REGION OF the planet that the 'Cosmos Queen' crashed on was liberally decorated with mountains, one of which it missed by a relative hairsbreadth before disintegrating noisily in a wide clearing that separated the forest from its stolid granite foot. The dust and wreckage took some time to settle, and it was several minutes after that that Dr. Sidney Williams, having surmised correctly that he was the sole survivor, emerged from the only section of the ship that had remained in one piece. He gazed forlornly at the alien landscape.

Locally, this consisted of multi-colored and highly attractive flora, backed by a picturesquely purple range of hills. Dr. Williams shuddered, hastily turned his back, and rooted feverishly among the bits and pieces until he found the subwave transmitter, a tangle of wires and dented casing that even his inexperienced eye told him was out of order. He kicked it, yelped, then limped across to a seat that projected miraculously upright among the debris. Slumped on it, he glowered at the landscape again.

He mistrusted nature in the raw. His first experience of its treachery had included being

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stung by a wasp, blundering innocently into a bed of nettles and being chased by a cow. The result of this encounter, a supposed treat that had been provided by his parents when he was six years old, had been to instil a deep loathing of all things green and insect-ridden. Concrete, plastic and the metallic hubbub of urban existance formed his natural habitat, and he was unhappy away from it. The travelling necessitated by his lecturing chores was a nuisance, but he simply stuffed himself with tranquillizers and kept his eyes firmly closed most of the time between cities.

His undertaking of a tour of the Alphard system had been occasioned by sheer financial necessity. Unrelenting pressure from his wife for the benefits to be derived from a further step up the professional and social scale, coupled with the recent unearthing in Singapore of a reputedly complete collection of the prolific Fletcher Henderson band's original 78 rpm recordings for which a mere cr. 5000 was being asked, had coincided with the offer from the Department of Cultural History (Colonial Division). Following reassurances that accidents were nowadays virtually unheard of and that unlimited sedation facilities were available, he signed the agreement with a shaking hand, packed his personal belongings and equipment and left.

The ship hadn't even got halfway to its destination. Due to some virtually unheard of mechanical mishap, they had been forced back into normal space on the outskirts of a small and obscure planetary system, short of fuel and in dire need of emergency repairs. It had been decided that these could be tackled more effectively on the ground, an unfortunate choice in view of the resultant situation.

Dr. Williams got up and wandered about the wreckage, kicking bits out of the way as he went. He didn't know whether to cut his throat then or wait until later, but in the meantime he didn't want to sit looking at the surroundings any longer than he had to. They both depressed and terrified him. He could feel the ominous proximity of greenery and smell its undisguised, unfiltered presence, hear its gentle stirring and rustling at the perimeter of the clearing, see its fragmentary movement from the corner of his eye as he moved, head down, among the forlorn remains of the ship.

What did it conceal? Life? It had to, he supposed. What sort of life? Peaceful? Threatening? A timid, herbivorous creature that was shyly concealing itself, or a prowling, slavering carnivore that watched him leeringly from the green darkness, savoring his obvious defenselessness, waiting only until his fear was sweet enough in

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its nostrils and then emerging to take him in its claws (tentacles?), preparatory to rending and devouring him . . .

He swallowed, and looked around for something sharp. A mustard-colored, familiar shape caught his eye, protruding from beneath a crumpled section of panelling.

Dr. Williams croaked an ejaculation of relief, partially occasioned by the reorientation gained from finding something familiar and also because it appeared at first glance to be undamaged. He dropped to his knees and eased the panelling to one side, his mouth dry with excitement, crooning softly and trying to keep his hands steady.

The case itself was thick with dust, but intact. The contents, though— He swallowed again. He wasn't worried overmuch about his clarinet, snugly cushioned on all sides in its special compartment, and it was doubtful that anything had happened to the spools themselves, but their playing apparatus was another matter. Although it was almost completely transistorised it inevitably contained a minimal number of moving parts, and despite their being made to withstand moderately rough handling they had recently been subjected to rather more than they could be reasonably expected to survive.

He unlocked the lid, and opened it. Excellent insulation had ensured that the contents had remained firmly in place, but that in itself was no guarantee against havoc having been wreaked at any one of several vital points. He licked his lips, said a brief silent prayer, and eased the machine up and out of the box.

Nothing tinkled. He held his breath, and shook it by his ear, very gently. Still nothing. Dr. Williams placed it on the ground, and stared at it hopefully.

As far as he could tell without actually trying it, it was undamaged. Had he been a man of mechanical aptitude, Dr. Williams would no doubt have carried out at least a cursory inspection as a precautionary measure before switching it on, but he was not. All he knew about its workings was that it was mercifully battery operated and that it carried a two year guarantee covering mechanical failure.

He wondered how many million miles away the nearest authorised repair agency was, and laughed, hysterically. If the machine was broken, it at least meant that further procrastination regarding his future would be quite pointless. Operative, it could at least save him from going insane as long as the batteries lasted (the case held several spares); also, it would almost certainly distract any marauding locals, if not exactly deter them. It was also pos-

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sible, he was reluctantly forced to concede, that it would actually attract them, but that was a chance he would simply have to take. With the solace that he could derive from it, life would be tolerable for at least a brief while; without it, unthinkable.

With a fixed and slightly demented smile on his face, Dr. Williams picked out a spool at random, fitted it, and pressed the 'ON' button. There was a click, a faint whisper of irremovable surface wear from the original recording that he had always found an endearingly essential part of the performance, and Duke Ellington's *Ko Ko* racketed into the stillness of the alien afternoon.

Dr. Williams sat cross-legged in front of the machine and laughed, deliriously and uncontrollably. Eyes closed, he immersed himself thankfully in the brassily percussive clamor that now drove back his darkly threatening surroundings, warming himself at the blessed fire of its familiarity. He roared ecstatic encouragement to the ensemble, whooped maniacally at the brief solo passages, and accompanied the final chorus with frenzied palm-slapping of his knees.

The performance crashed to a close, but Dr. Williams' cackling laugh still held the sombre clutter of the forest at bay as he switched off the machine with a triumphant forefinger, and sprawled back among the debris. He had been spared. It meant only a brief respite, it was true; weeks, a month or two possibly, but with the pick of his life's researching to sustain him, his final days would be made tolerable, perhaps in a bitter-sweet way even happy. He would smother his loneliness with the greatest performances of the archaic musical form that he loved and which had been his life's work, seeking out each nuance, each subtle harmonic and rhythmic coloration, so that when the time came, when the batteries were finally exhausted, then he would take his leave smilingly and with a full heart, grateful for the opportunity that Fate had seen fit to . . .

Some distance away, the opening bars of Duke Ellington's *Ko Ko* grunted springily into being beyond the muffling barrier of the trees.

Dr. Williams leaped to his feet, a galvanized reflex that toppled him again immediately as his legs were still crossed. Slightly stunned by his fall, he sprawled amid the wreckage, listening with a mixture of disbelief, puzzlement and sheer terror to the unmistakable (and yet oddly different) Ellingtonian voicing of brass and reeds that blared from the surrounding forest.

Despite his confusion, a small corner of Dr. Williams' mind analytically considered the possible causes of this phenomenon. His

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initial wild guess, that the construction of the local terrain produced some sort of freak echo effect, was hastily rejected. He was no geologist, but he was pretty certain that an echo that took approximately four minutes to become activated was quite beyond credence.

That seemed to leave two possibilities, the first of which was tenuous to the point of invisibility, the second simply distasteful. Either (1) another castaway such as himself, coincidentally equipped with identical machinery and recordings, had chosen to respond in kind upon hearing Dr. Williams' announcement of his presence, or (2) he was already crazy.

The music, he realised, was becoming louder. It was now accompanied by other sounds; the crashing of displaced undergrowth, a muffled thunder that could have been the tread of heavy feet. He felt the ground vibrate beneath him, a gigantic pulse-beat that was, he was suddenly and sickly aware, in rhythmic sympathy with the performance, matching perfectly the churning swing of guitar, bass and drums.

Giddily, he pushed himself to his feet. Whatever it was, delusion or nightmare reality, he had to get away.

He bundled the machine back into its container, and glared wildly around him. An opening the size of a manhole cover showed blackly at the foot of the nearby cliff. Without pausing to consider that it might be inhabited, Dr. William lurchingly covered the fifty yards that seperated him from it, and dived inside.

It was a small, round cave, little bigger than a telephone booth, and mercifully empty. He huddled as far back from the entrance as he could, clutching the machine protectively in front of him, and peered squintingly out into the clearing.

Beyond the wreckage of the ship, he saw the greenery part. To the accompaniment of shouting trumpets and thrusting saxophones, a figure emerged into the open. It was approximately the size of a full-grown elephant, bright cerise, and the upper part of its unpleasantly lumpy body was surrounded by a sinuously weaving pattern of tendrils that ended in fringed, cup-like openings. It was apparently headless, but two eyes, nostrils and a generous mouth were visible behind the threshing fronds. Four squat legs supported its enormous bulk, each the diameter of a fair sized tree.

It was rather, Dr. Williams sweatingly concluded, like a cross between an outsized potato sack and an octopus, but whatever it was one thing was abundantly and deafeningly certain. It was the source of the music that now rang about the clearing in unshielded, cacophonus triumph, uproarious

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accompaniment to the creature's ground-shaking gait.

It trotted cumbrously round the wreckage, blaring as it went. As it passed Dr. Williams' hiding place, it fendered a creditable imitation of the initial statement by double-bass, muscular strumming that came to an abrupt and sinister halt as it passed out of his sight.

He shrank into a near-fetal position as one of the cup-like objects thrust its way through the entrance. It hesitated in front of him, then pounced, an exuberant movement that strangely reminded the almost fainting Dr. Williams of a small dog that he had once owned.

The cup explored him, the individual serrations on its edge prodding and stroking like independent, curious fingers. Another entered the cave and joined in the inspection. Their touch was warm, dry, and not unpleasant, and they gave off a mildly lemon-like odor.

After what seemed an eternity, they retreated. Dr. Williams steeled himself for the next move, fervently wishing that he'd cut his throat when he had the opportunity. None of this, of course, was real. He must still be on the ship, delirious—possibly even dying—from the effects of the crash. Perhaps they hadn't crashed at all. Perhaps this was simply some atrocious nightmare engendered by his fear of travel and its imagined consequences. The ingredients, after all, were all there; his lone survival, the grotesquely impossible musical performance and its equally ludicrous perpetrator that now lurked outside his place of shelter, his . . .

Ko Ko pumped its way into existence again, this time containing a distinctly alien added quality. Instead of its customary animal-like elation, it sounded positively plaintive.

Dr. Williams listened for a brief awe-struck period, then smeared the sweat from his eyes with a wobbling hand and tried to think.

Accepting purely for the sake of argument that the situation was real, what for pity's sake *was* the creature that now sat outside the cave making noises like the long-dead Duke Ellington band in full cry? He laboriously reviewed its actions, trying to build up some sort of composite picture that would give him a clue as to its nature and purpose.

The conclusions that he eventually drew, while outside the fifth straight rendition of 'Ko Ko' thundered towards its conclusion, were absurd but inescapable. Somehow, in some multidexterous way that was quite beyond his imagining, it was capable of memorising or recording what it heard and then repeating it in minute detail, even to the extent of approximately simulating the individual timbres necessary to achieve the final col-

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lective sound. This was sheer lunacy, of course, but Dr. Williams doggedly faced up to the fact that on the present evidence there was no other possible explanation. Secondly, it was either quite young or relatively stupid. Its attitude was clearly that of a dog or small child that wanted to play, the unmistakably plaintive note now having taken on a whining quality that grated unpleasantly on his already highly strung nerves.

His experience of both dogs and children had been limited of late years, a situation largely dictated by his wife who had no interest in either, but he knew that both had a tendency to sulk when denied their immediate interest. Discipline, of course, was the correct treatment, but he couldn't see how he was going to apply any under the existing circumstances. All things considered, co-operation seemed the better part of valor, a decision aided by the fact that absence of anything that could be remotely construed as aggressive intent had at last permitted Dr. Williams' curiosity to at least partially overcome his fear.

He opened the container, placed the machine on the floor of the cave, selected and fitted another spool, and pressed the 'ON' button again. 'Potato Head Blues' by the Louis Armstrong Hot Seven clattered from the speaker, well-nigh deafening him until he made hasty adjustments to the controls. Beyond the cave entrance, he could detect signs of excited movement. A tentacle tip appeared, jigging solemnly, shortly to be joined by others.

Dr. Williams took a deep breath, said yet another silent but fervent prayer, and crawled outside with the machine blaring under one arm.

The greeting that he received, he had no doubt, was friendly. Tendrils patted, smoothed and tickled him from all angles, sometimes clumsily, but all with a marked absence of animosity. Dr. Williams clung grimly to the still performing machine and bore the buffeting with as much equinimity as he could muster, flinching only occasionally.

The music chirruped to a close, provoking obvious consternation and an abrupt halt to the amiably excited pawing. This recommenced, briefly, as the caustic virtuosity of Charlie Parker's saxophone scurried from the speaker, then ceased altogether as the creature carefully lowered itself to a squatting position, its tendrils now moving in gently bobbing patterns that made Dr. Williams think light-headedly of dancing flowers. Gingerly, and wearing a fatuously polite smile, he joined it on the ground, offering thanks for the apparently safe opportunity to do so before his legs gave way of their own accord.

The spool took some twenty

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minutes to run its course. During that time they were regaled by the thickly textured sonorities of Coleman Hawkins, a brace of roaring pieces from the Woody Herman and Count Basie bands, an Art Tatum solo and several sourly elated numbers by an Eddie Condon group. Apart from a cautiously twitching foot Dr. Williams sat motionless, eyeing his incredible companion and its movements with wary fascination. Occasionally and startlingly the creature would counterpoint the current ensemble or solo with a phrase of its own, intrusions that initially did little to aid the subsidence of Dr. Williams state of tension, but which he eventually came to await with eager anticipation. These embellishments took a variety of forms, each displaying an astonishing degree of sympathy with the performance.

The final number on the spool commenced, a dryly dragging performance of the blues. With a certain stiff embarrassment, Dr. Williams got to his feet, returned to his former place of refuge, and procured the component parts of his clarinet. He assembled it with hands that now shook only slightly, religiously moistened the reed, then returned to sit in his former position.

He joined in cautiously at first, adding a muttered, almost apologetic embroidery to the trombone solo, inserting his phrases carefully between and around its familiar ruminations. Other instruments joined in for the final collective chorus, and Dr. Williams went with them, piping plaintive comments that were interspersed with the occasional squeak brought about by nervousness and lack of practice and listening with one eagerly attentive ear to the now more frequent and brassily stated interjections supplied by the extraordinary figure before him.

The performance sank to a muted close. There was a brief, solemn silence, and then the creature began to make music of its own, single-voiced and softly at first, but swelling gradually to a richly textured fortissimo; jagged, dissonant sounds that caused the hairs at the nape of Dr. Williams' neck to lift ecstatically and his foot to match its insistent pulse.

It was some minutes before he fully realised what was happening. The music contained passages that he found vaguely familiar, but recognition, when it came, still startled him. A chromatic passage that was nothing more nor less than pure Tatum or Hawkins would be followed immediately by the creature's own variations, spine-tingling patterns that meshed perfectly with the rambling yet oddly coherent structure of the music.

Dr. Williams became dimly aware that at some point in the proceedings he had joined in

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again, contributing strangely angular phrases that he would never normally have been capable of conceiving, let alone attempting to perform. He ducked and bobbed and weaved with the music, instinctively following the tantalising zig-zag of modulations, somehow seeking out the right note, the apt harmonic aside.

At long last, it faded and died. Dr. Williams twiddled a startlingly intervalled and totally fitting coda, then sat in deep reverie, inexpressibly content. The skies might fall, he could be stricken with some dread and unheard of disease that was beyond his curing, he might even suddenly find himself viewed in a rather more edible light by the odd and now silent and motionless figure that sat not eight feet away from him, but nothing could destroy the happiness that he felt at that moment. In the past he had added his not altogether unaccomplished embellishments to countless recorded performances, but absence of willing fellow participants had always ensured that these were solitary intrusions onto already familiar ground. Now, for the very first time, the crutch of foreknowledge had been removed, leaving him dependent entirely on his own imagination, his own abilities.

And it hadn't been half bad, Dr. Williams thought. He felt a muffled surge of vanity, then let it come jauntily through in all its unabashed swagger. No, by God, it hadn't been *half* bad.

He glanced briefly at the creature, placed his clarinet back in his mouth, tapped his foot briskly four times, then blew.

Some little time after that, the strains of an exuberant and quite unique performance of "Tea for Two", played by an extraordinary collection of instruments that included bassoon-like croakings and something that sounded vaguely like a plunger-muted sousaphone racketed raspingly through the slowly darkening forest.

Despite his occasional recourse to prayer in times of stress, Dr. Williams was not a religious man and correspondingly had little faith in miracles, but he couldn't help feeling that his finding himself in his present surroundings constituted something closely akin to such a happening. But whatever the cause, he existed in a place of earth and rock and water, bountifully equipped with fruit and vegetables that cautious experiment soon proved tastily edible, abundant shelter, a total absence of any other life-form larger than a rabbit, and its immediate region otherwise populated solely by himself and the brightly hued being that had become his constant companion and sharer of endless musical excursions that soon left him with a lip like iron and an instrumental technique that he had

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never dreamed could possibly be his.

There were minor inconveniences, it was true. Insects were frequently present in both variety and abundance, but while they were an undoubted nuisance, he was, oddly, never bitten. Also, it rained, not often but torrentially when it did happen. Dr. Williams found these things moderately unpleasant, but readily acknowledged that they were a remarkably small price to pay when viewing the picture in toto.

During the early days of his relationship with the creature, understandably excited by what seemed to him to be the perfectly reasonable possibility of establishing verbal contact, he attempted simple conversational training, but it soon became apparent that his efforts in this direction were to be in vain. It obligingly aped his carefully enunciated phrases—always, disconcertingly, mimicking his own light baritone—but there it ended. It was plain that this activity was simply regarded as some inexplicable diversion on his own part which it was willing to humor, and Dr. Williams was forced to the reluctant conclusion that its own mode of communication took some entirely different course to that of his own species. Possibly it was telepathic, an achievement that still remained little more than a dream in the minds of men. But his disappointment was short-lived. Musically, they daily reached a degree of rapport that spoke effortlessly of universal feelings and reactions, an emotional link that invoked his own immediate responses and from which he derived enormous comfort.

If there was a happier man anywhere in the universe, Dr. Williams would have laughed with uproarious disbelief on being informed of his existence. He still found it beyond him to fully accept that his present circumstances were anything other than a dream, but since he was a thinking man and therefore one who had frequently pondered on the true nature of reality, he was not unduly perturbed. Perhaps this was reality and the man-made clutter of plastic, steel and concrete that he had suddenly and astonishingly come to loathe was the dream, a nightmare peopled with uncaring, uncomprehending individuals with whom he had never really communicated and whose idly uniform acceptance of the multi-sensory exercises that now constituted their staple entertainment he scorned with the fervor of the true purist. Occasionally he thought about his wife, and shuddered. Was it possible that such a person really existed, that such a bizarre liason had been formed! At such times he would hastily assemble his clarinet, and then immerse himself in a positive fury of invention that successfully, if

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only temporarily, dispelled such horrifying shadows.

The pattern of his new existence was soon formed. During the days they would wander through the placid confines of the forest, Dr. Williams engaged in desultory exploration, his companion plainly content to let itself be led by its new-found friend. Occasionally, they came across evidence of a civilization, oddly deserted machinery that lay rusting and overgrown in the green shadows, always without any hint of its nature or clue to its ownership. At such times the creature would lurk at a distance, its customary exuberance stilled, only returning when they moved on and the corroded enigma was well behind them. Once, they came to a village, a bleakly regimented block of impractically pyramidal buildings that squatted silent and deserted among the encroaching fronds. Dr. Williams entered one, and found its walls and floor liberally decorated with huge and rusting shackles. They departed, hastily, his companion tooting its obvious relief and his own ethnological suspicions further confirmed by what he had seen.

The creature's amiable lack of intelligence, coupled with its particular musical capabilities, was the key. Clearly, it was a member, possibly the sole survivor, of a subject race; slaves and entertainers, the playthings of a technically advanced but cruel species who had, for reasons that would almost certainly remain unexplained (plague?), deserted them, fleeing the forests to seek the shelter and assistance to be found in their cities. Dr. Williams hoped with grim fervency that these were either several thousand miles away or preferably on another planet altogether.

Each evening, as they rested in the darkening shadows, he would produce the machine, solemnly select a spool, and for a while the brassy effervescence or sadly declamatory strains of jazz, performances that spanned the ninety brief years of its existence as an entity, would stir the stillness of the sleeping forest. Then, when the final blast or sigh had died and the rhythmic pulse was stilled, the recital would begin again, and he would listen, head bowed, to the patterns of simulated brass and reed that hummed and chortled in the darkness, marvelling at the now hair-fine accuracy of the copy, yet always conscious of the minutely subtle differences that labelled it as such.

For Dr. Williams understood his chosen music well, and his knowledge that in its moments of greatness it became a highly personal means of statement he found both heartening and sad. It meant, simply, that when the last of the batteries had been used, access to the music in its true form would

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be gone forever. Yet might this not be, he reflected, in some ways for the best? He was living a new life in a new world, and nostalgia could all too easily imprison him in a cocoon of memories, only partially aware of the truths of his miraculously compatible existence.

Weeks later, a spool faltered for the last time. Sadly but firmly, as though unable to bear the death agonies of a dear friend, Dr. Williams pressed the switch, cutting Chu Berry off in uncharacteristically faltering mid-solo. He packed machine and spools neatly in their case, and when morning came scooped a hole at the base of a tree and buried them. The creature stood some little distance away, respectfully silent, its posture one of sadness and commisseration. Dr. Williams marked the tree with the five lines of the stave, carefully carved the notations of the flatted third and fifth in the key of Bb, then turned and walked away without a backward glance.

The effects of his loss soon passed. It still echoed in their own musical forays, sudden glaring reminders of lifelong idols and favorite performances that he learned to accept with equinimity and use as harmonic springboards to creations of their own. Each passing day found him increasingly aware of the understanding that integrated their musical conception, something that had existed from the beginning but was now of an interweaving complexity beyond anything that he had ever remotely envisaged. The barrier between them, composed of space and environment, was shredding, and they were moving inexorably towards a blending of musical thought and tradition that he sensed would be the greater both for its fusion and the inevitable discarding of parts of both.

This hitherto untrod plateau was reached one sultry afternoon some weeks later. Dr. Williams lay beneath a tree at the edge of a large clearing, drowsily contemplating the profuse and picturesque greenery in the near distance, while his companion wandered close by, droning a pleasant but seemingly aimless pattern of sound that played softly and at first soothingly.

A sudden and unexpected modulation occurred, a tonal and harmonic obliquity that caused Dr. Williams to stiffen abruptly and twist his head towards the now still figure that faced him from the centre of the clearing. The creature sang on, sounds that built gradually to a complex of timbres that he had never heard before yet which flicked tantalisingly against his mind, stimulating areas of reaction that were contradictorily both new and hauntingly familiar. Something boiled sharply inside his consciousness and as suddenly subsided, an abruptly cleansing explosion that left him shaking with unfulfilled awareness.

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He sat up, removed the sections of his clarinet from his haversack, and assembled them with a trance-like deliberateness. Still seated beneath the tree he began to play, probing low-register adornments that added harmonic sinew to the bubbling search, shepherding the other's inventions firmly towards the ultimate cohesion that he knew had come at last, and suddenly, like an exultant shout, the pattern was resolved into a sustained sonic tapestry that rang about the clearing, dissolving their surroundings and the very ground beneath them; timeless, placeless sound that seemed to radiate out to the farthest reaches of infinity. Eyes closed, Dr. Williams let his now unbidden fingers seek out the ingredients that were his contribution to this miracle, never faltering in their search, surely predestined in the unhesitating rightness of their choice. He soared and plummetted in a vast sea of sound of which he was an integral part, filled with a sense of completeness that he had never known or dreamed could possibly be. Time was without meaning, space a boundless vista that echoed the triumph of their empathy. Weeping and unresisting, Dr. Williams let himself be reborn.

Soft and distant at first, so faint that he at first accepted it as a not yet integrated part of this happening, an oddly discordant note infiltrated his awareness, a gradually swelling intrusion that bored implacably into this emotional narcosis. Vaguely, he wondered if he had suddenly become acceptable to the native insect population, perhaps about to pay a symbolic toll that marked his physical as well as spiritual acceptance into his new world. He flapped a temporarily unoccupied hand by his ear. The buzzing persisted, loudly now, a pointless, jarring obbligato to the music which flooded about him, its creator seemingly lost in an ecstasy of sound and movement that grew in intensity as it progressed.

His inability to ever fully accept the reality of his surroundings had been a natural precaution on Dr. Williams' part, an instinctively erected barrier against the possible presence of insanity that he had only lowered completely minutes before. Now, suddenly, as the dark pool of shadow swept across the clearing and the huge and writhing figure that faced him, it was as though it had snapped back into place of its own volition, insulating him, so that he watched what followed in a detached way, warily waiting for its completion before committing himself to accept it as fact.

The shadow passed on, yet somehow it had remained, a whispily fringed darkness that now dulled the customarily bright body of his friend. Dr. Williams watched stiffly as its movements

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accelerated explosively from a graceful weaving pattern to grotesque and terrifying frenzy. Simultaneously, the music dissolved into screaming clamor.

The creature's collapse was slow. To Dr. Williams' disbelieving eyes it seemed to shrink upon itself, movement that was blurred by the thickening haze of smoke around it and which now touched his nostrils, acrid and sickening. He watched its tendrils aimlessly collide and intertwine, still blaring their dissonant agony but weaker by the second, a dying fall of sound that slid jerkingly down in deathly accompaniment to the movements of its maker.

Its final fall was punctuated by various unpleasant sounds. It lay before him, a charred and convulsively deflating thing that bubbled offensively at irregular intervals. Otherwise, it was quite silent.

From the corner of his eye, Dr. Williams saw other movement. He turned his head to watch the small scout ship that had just landed and disgorged two men who now made their way hurriedly towards him. As they passed the still smoking mound they produced weapons and fired them in its direction.

How pointless, he thought. Anyone can see that it's dead.

They reached him and assisted him to his feet, sudden movement that made him feel violently ill. He stared at them, serious faces above blue uniforms.

"We had a hell of a job finding you", one face said. "The automatic signal got through all right, so we didn't have any trouble with the co-ordinates, but this place is all trees. You must be best part of a hundred miles from the ship. Why didn't you stay close to it?" There was a pause. After a moment, the other face said, "It's lucky for you you were out in the open when we did find you. We couldn't have happened along at a better time if we'd rehearsed it. What was that thing, anyway?"

Dr. Williams found that he was still unexpectedly holding his clarinet. He shook his head, focussed squintingly, grasped it with both hands, and swung it like a club at the nearest face. There was a startled ejaculation, a blur of movement, and he was thrown face down onto the ground. Someone straddled him, and he felt moist coldness dabbing on his arm.

"Poor guy", a panting voice said. "He must have really taken off. If anybody saved me from a thing like that, the last thing I'd do would be to try and brain them." There was a prick that he hardly felt, and the voice faded, abruptly.

And then Dr. Williams slept and dreamed dreams that were full of huge shadows and burning men in blue uniforms who screamed and sang mad songs while they danced and died. He watched their fuming gyrations critically, applauding as they disintegrated

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into ashes at his feet. Occasionally it seemed to him that they loomed close, smiling down at him and talking to him in soothing voices, and then he in turn would scream at them until they were momentarily snuffed out, reappearing through the diffusing pall of smoke, once more singing their tortured and incoherent songs and performing their burning dance against the darkness beyond.

When the ship reached Earth he was immediately rushed to a place where doctors and machines were waiting to seal off the nightmares forever behind impregnable doors, and after a time they succeeded. Under treatment, his experiences shrank and grew misty in his mind until they finally winked feebly out, pushed firmly and efficiently beyond the boundaries of recall. He still knew—because he was told—that he had been involved in an accident of some kind, but the doctors prudently fabricated a suitable story as to its supposed nature and whereabouts. Knowledge of the truth was the key to memory and possible disaster, and the treatment was an expensive business that the insurance people were reluctant to pay for more than once per claimant. Consequently, he was encouraged to believe that he had been the victim of a piece of careless driving on the part of an unapprehended jetster, and was indignantly content to accept this as the cause of the blank spot that persisted in his mind. He was also reunited with his wife, whose tearful solicitude was quite genuine and which lasted for all of three weeks before being replaced by the verbal prodding that he somehow found rather less bearable now.

Following a period of convalescence, Dr. Williams resumed his professional activities, lecturing to bored or faintly amused audiences on campuses and in sparsely filled halls, only rarely encountering a flicker of genuine interest or understanding. He had grown ac-customed to this a long time before, but now, at times, he somehow shared their apathy. The music still stirred him with its brassy melancholy, but there were occasions when it seemed that its vitals had been suddenly and inexplicably removed, leaving behind a thin and empty shell of sound that rang hollowly on his ear. When this happened, Dr. Williams would feel something that was inescapably buried inside him stir faintly, a dim and fading cadence that sounded far beyond his remembering but which briefly moved him to wonderment and an intangible longing.

And at night he would stare up at the sky, never knowing why, seeking something that he could not name among the distant and glittering stars, the dying echo of a song that had once (and only once) been sung, and which would never now be sung again. ◀

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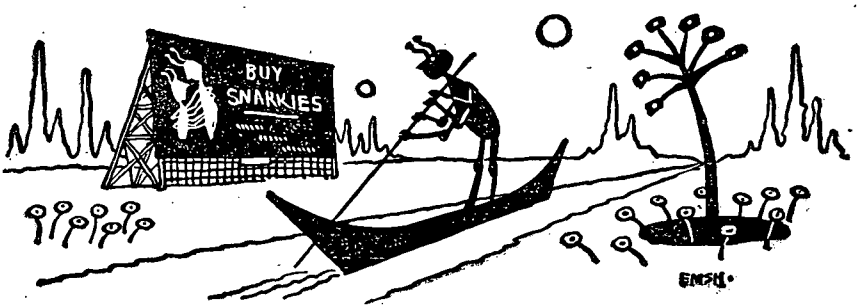

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